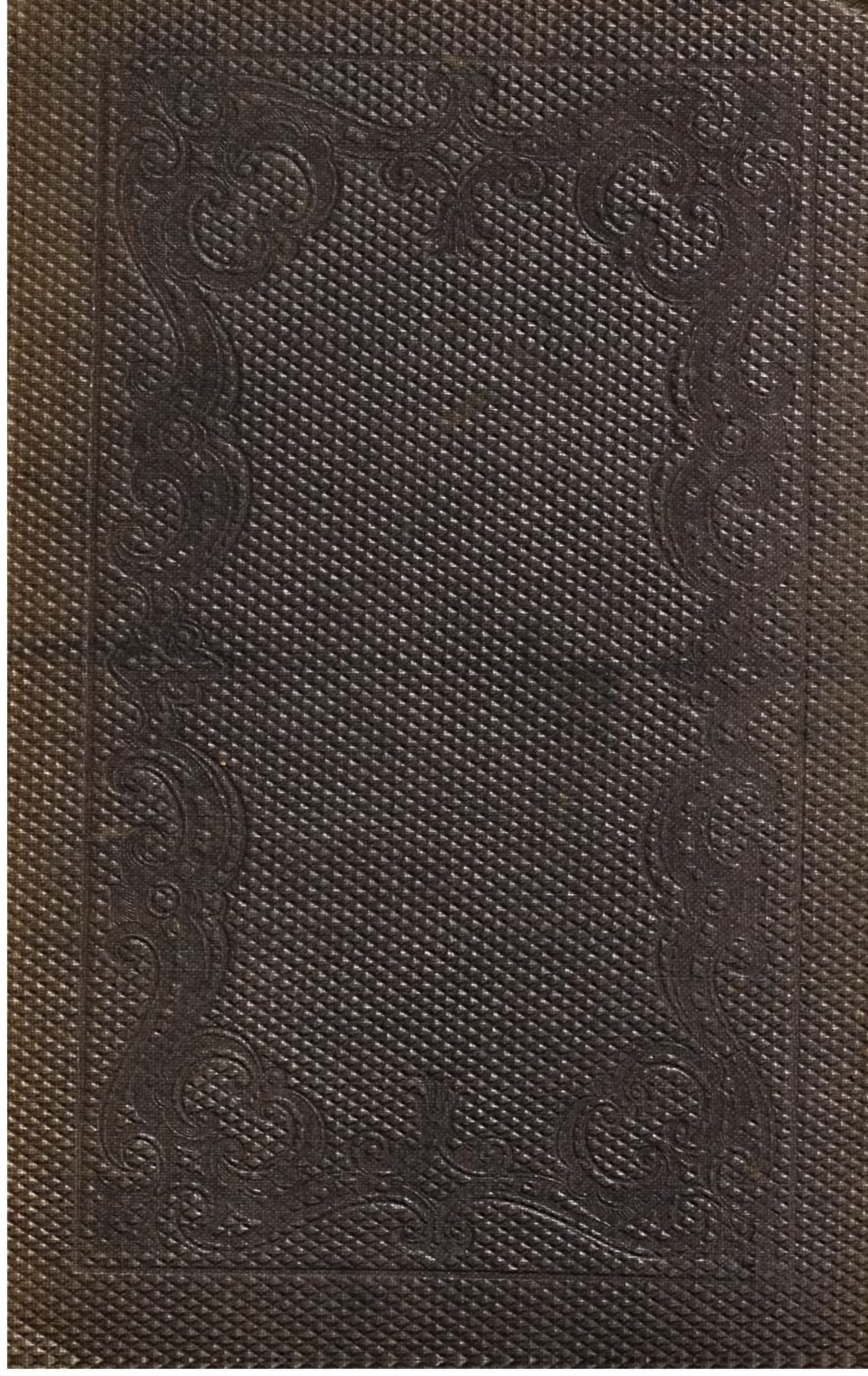




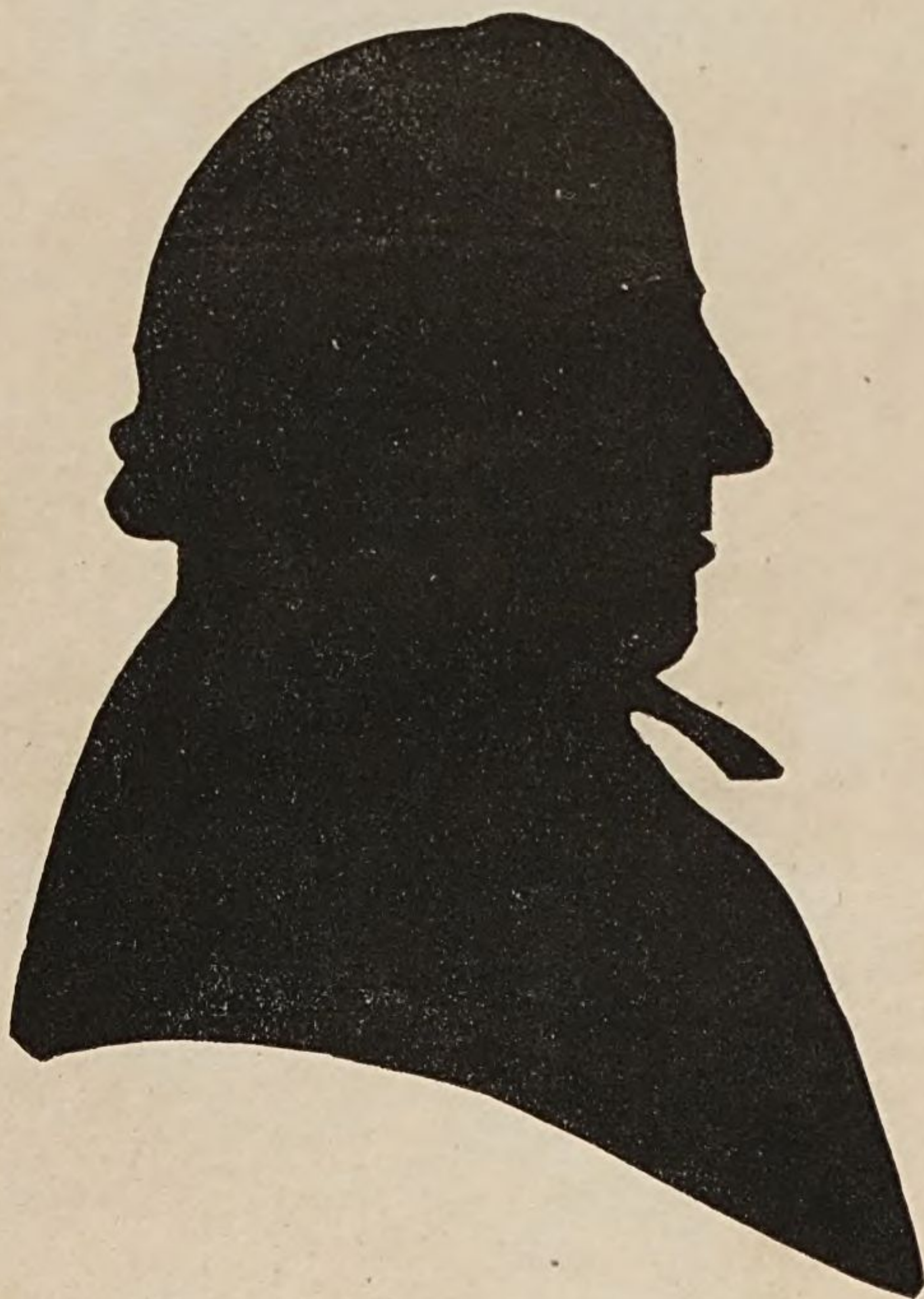
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THE FORCE OF TRUTH :

AN
APOTHECARY NARRATIVE :

BY
THE LATE REV. THOMAS SCOTT,

RECTOR OF ASTON, SANDHURST, BUCKS.

WITH NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS
BY THE LATE REV. JOHN SCOTT, M. A.

OF THE LONDON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, AND VICAR OF ST. MARK'S,
LONDON.

LONDON :

JOHN JOHNSON, 100 FLEET STREET.

1844.



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L. AND G. SEELEY, 169 FLEET STREET.

1836.



L. AND G. SEELEY, WESTON GREEN, THAMES DITTON.

PREFACE

TO THE FIFTH EDITION.

ALMOST twenty years have now elapsed since the ensuing narrative was published. During this time the author has had abundant opportunities of examining, over and over again, the principles which he then intended to inculcate. If therefore he had, on further reflection, materially altered his sentiments, he should have thought himself bound, by the strongest obligations, to retract what he had erroneously advanced. But he is thankful that, on the contrary, he feels it incumbent on him to declare most solemnly, and in the presence of God, that every thing which he has since experienced, ob-

served, heard, and read, has concurred in establishing his most assured confidence, that the doctrines recommended in this publication are the grand and distinguishing peculiarities of genuine Christianity.

Very many *verbal* corrections, with a few retrenchments and additions, will be found in this edition. In improvements of this kind the author has bestowed considerable pains: but he has been *scrupulously*, and almost *superstitiously*, careful to admit no alteration which can in the least degree change the meaning of any passage.

He feels thankful that the leading desire of his heart, in publishing a work which seems to relate almost exclusively to himself and his own little concerns, has not been wholly disappointed: but he would earnestly request the prayers of all who favour the doctrines here inculcated, for a more abundant and extensive blessing on this, and all his other feeble endeavours, to “contend

“ earnestly for the faith once delivered to the
“ saints.”

CHAPEL-STREET, LOCK HOSPITAL, OCT. 16, 1789.

N.B. The first Edition was dated Feb. 26, 1779, when the
author was curate of Ravenstone and Weston-Underwood,
near Olney, Bucks.

PREFACE
TO THE NINTH EDITION.

The increasing sale of this pamphlet, nearly as many being now circulated in a year as were at first in ten years, is a high gratification to the author ; as, at the close of the thirty-third year, he is more fully than ever confirmed in his judgment respecting the doctrine contained in it.

ASTON SANDFORD, FEB. 1, 1812.

MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR.

Mr. Scott was the son of a grazier at Braytoft, near Spilsby, in Lincolnshire, where he was born February 16, 1747. The first ten years of his life were spent chiefly at home: the next five at school at Scorton, near Richmond, in Yorkshire. Soon after his return from school, in 1762, he was apprenticed to a surgeon and apothecary at Alford, a few miles from his native place: but continued a very short time in that situation. He returned home and passed the next nine years with his father, employed generally in the humblest and most laborious parts of a grazier's business.

“On this”—the work of a grazier—“I entered at the beginning of winter; and, as much of my father's farm consisted of low land, which was frequently flooded, I was introduced to scenes of hardship, and exposed to many dangers from wet and cold, for which my previous habits had not prepared me. In consequence I was frequently ill, and at length suffered such repeated and obstinate maladies, (especially the ague, and effects following from it,) that my life was more than once despaired of. . . . I had now many serious thoughts of God and eternity, and every illness produced a sort of paroxysm of religion; in which, having prayed for pardon in an earnest but ignorant manner, I felt satisfied that I should be happy if I died: though, as soon as I was restored to health, all my religion vanished as the morning cloud.”

In Mr. Scott's Memoir of himself, included in his “Life,” he gives the following remarkable account of the means by which this “first” conviction of guilt and danger was excited in his mind “about the sixteenth year” of his age. It was during his short apprenticeship at Alford. His master, though “considered as very skilful” in his profession, was “unprincipled” and probably “an infidel:” yet, remonstrating with his apprentice on some instance of misconduct, this ungodly man was led to observe, that “he ought to recollect, that it was not only displeasing to *him*, but wicked in the sight of God.” “This remark,” Mr. S. says, “produced a new sensation in my soul, which no subsequent efforts could destroy; and proved, I am fully satisfied, as far as any thing proceeding from man was instrumental to it, the primary means of my subsequent conversion.—With this circumstance, therefore, my narrative in the Force of Truth commences.”

He subsequently observes, that he had “considerable

MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR.

“difficulties to surmount in obtaining admission into the “ministry, arising from his peculiar circumstances.” It will naturally be supposed that this must have been the case, when it is considered in what manner his time from the sixteenth to the twenty-sixth year of his age had been spent. His determination to make the attempt arose from discovering that he was not, in the event of his father’s death, to be provided for in the grazing line, in a way which would at all enable him to maintain a family. This induced him “to throw “off his shepherd’s frock,” and to introduce himself to a clergyman at Boston, of whom he had some slight knowledge. He had “not seen a Greek book, except an Eton grammar,” for almost ten years : yet, so well had he been grounded at Scorton, that, on having a Greek Testament put into his hands, he readily construed the Gospels both into Latin and English, first before the clergyman at Boston, and then before Archdeacon Gordon, the Bishop of Lincoln’s examining chaplain : and there is every reason to believe that he would have been in orders within seven weeks after first leaving his father’s house, but for a delay respecting his papers, and for some groundless suspicions of *methodism*, which it seems attached to him. Three months afterwards he was ordained at Buckden, by Dr. Green, Bishop of Lincoln, to the curacy of Martin near Horncastle ; but, after officiating there two Sundays, removed with the bishop’s consent, and indeed at his suggestion, to the curacies of Stoke Goldington and Weston Underwood, near Newport Pagnell, Bucks. He afterwards exchanged the curacy of Stoke for that of the adjoining parish of Ravenstone. In 1777 he took up his residence at Weston, at which place his *Force of Truth* is dated in 1779. “It was,” he tells us, “revised by Mr. Cowper,” the poet, (who then lived at Olney,) “and, as to style and externals, but not otherwise, considerably improved by his advice.” A Dutch translation of this work was published at Amsterdam in 1786 ; and editions in the French language have since been printed at Paris and Geneva : yet in England the first edition of one thousand copies was ten years on sale ! Recently, however, as many copies have been sold in a month, for many months successively.

In 1781, Mr. S. resigned the curacy of Ravenstone for that of Olney, whence, at the close of 1785, he removed to London ; and thence, in 1803, to the rectory of Aston Sandford, near Aylesbury, Bucks ; where he died, April 16, 1821.

THE FORCE OF TRUTH.

PART I.

An Account of the state of the Author's mind and conscience in the early part of his life ; especially shewing what his sentiments and conduct were, at the beginning of that change of which he proposes to give the history.

THOUGH I was not educated in what is commonly considered as ignorance of God and religion ; yet, till the sixteenth year of my age, I do not remember that I ever was under any serious conviction of being a sinner, in danger of wrath, or in need of mercy ; nor did I ever, during this part of my life, that I recollect, offer one hearty prayer to God in secret. “ Being
“ alienated from God through the igno-
“ rance that was in me,” I lived without him in the world ; and as utterly neglected

to pay him any voluntary service, as if I had been an atheist in principle.

But about my sixteenth year I began to see that I was a sinner. I was indeed a leper in every part, there being 'no health in me;' but, out of many external indications of inward depravity, conscience discovered and reproached me with one especially; and I was, for the first time, disquieted with apprehensions of the wrath of an offended God. My attendance at the Lord's table was expected about the same time; and, though I was very ignorant of the meaning and end of that sacred ordinance; yet this circumstance, united with the accusations of my conscience, brought an awe upon my spirits, and interrupted my before undisturbed course of sin.

Being, however, an utter stranger to the depravity and helplessness of fallen nature, I had no doubt that I could amend my life whenever I pleased. Previously therefore to communicating, I set about an unwilling reformation; and, procuring a form of prayer, I attempted to pay my secret addresses to the Majesty of heaven. Having in this manner silenced my conscience, I partook of the ordinance: I held my reso-

lutions also, and continued my devotions, such as they were, for a short time: but they were a weariness and a task to me; and, temptations soon returning, I relapsed; so that my prayer-book was thrown aside, and no more thought of, till my conscience was again alarmed by the next warning given for the celebration of the Lord's supper. Then the same ground was gone over again, and with the same issue. My "goodness was like the morning dew that passeth away;" and, loving sin and disrelishing religious duties as much as ever, I returned, as "the sow that is washed to her wallowing in the mire."

With little variation, this was my course of life for nine years: but in that time I had such experience of my own weakness, and of the superior force of temptation, that I secretly concluded reformation in my case to be impracticable. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" I was experimentally convinced that I was equally unable, with the feeble barrier of resolutions and endeavours, to stem the torrent of my impetuous inclinations, when swelled by welcome, suitable, and powerful temptations: and, being ig-

norant that God had reserved this to himself as his own work, and had engaged to do it for the poor sinner, who, feeling his own insufficiency, is heartily desirous to have it done by him ; I stifled my convictions as well as I could, and put off my repentance to a “ more convenient season.”

But, being of a reflecting turn, and much alone, my mind was almost constantly employed. Aware of the uncertainty of life, I was disquieted with continual apprehensions that this “ more convenient season” would never arrive ; especially as, through an unconfirmed state of health, I had many warnings and near prospects of death and eternity. For a long time I entertained no doubt that impenitent sinners would be miserable for ever in hell : and at some seasons such amazing reflections upon this awful subject forced themselves into my mind, that I was overpowered by them, and my fears became intolerable. At such times my extemporary cries for mercy were so wrestling and persevering, that I was scarcely able to give over ; though at others I lived without prayer of any sort ! Yet, in my darkest hours, though my conscience was

awakened to discover more and more sinfulness in my whole behaviour, there remained a hope that I should one day repent and turn to God. If this hope was from myself, it was a horrid presumption ; but the event makes me willing to acknowledge a persuasion that it was from the Lord : for, had it not been for this hope, I should probably have given way to temptations, which frequently assaulted me, to put an end to my own life, in proud discontent with my lot in this world, and mad despair about another.

A hymn of Dr. Watts's, entitled ' The all-seeing God,' (in his admirable little book for children) at this time fell in my way : I was much affected with it, and, having committed it to memory, was frequently repeating it ; and was thus continually led to reflect on my guilt and danger.—Parents may from this inconsiderable circumstance be reminded, that it is of great importance to store their children's memories with useful matter, instead of suffering them to be furnished with such corrupting trash as is commonly taught them. They know not what use God may make of these early rudiments of instruction in future life.

At this period, though I was the slave of sin, yet, my conscience not being pacified, nor my principles greatly corrupted, there seemed some hope concerning me ; but at length Satan took a very effectual method of silencing my convictions, that I might sleep securely in my sins : and justly was I given over to a “ strong delusion to believe a lie,” when I “ held the truth” that I did know “ in unrighteousness.” A Socinian comment on the Scriptures came in my way, and I greedily drank the poison, because it quieted my fears, and flattered my abominable pride. The whole system coincided exactly with my inclinations and the state of my mind. In reading this exposition, sin seemed to lose its native ugliness, and to appear a very small and tolerable evil ; man’s imperfect obedience seemed to shine with an excellency almost divine ; and God appeared so entirely and necessarily merciful, that he could not make any of his creatures miserable, without contradicting his natural propensity. These things influenced my mind so powerfully, that I was enabled to consider myself, notwithstanding a few little blemishes, as upon the whole a very worthy

being. At the same time, the mysteries of the gospel being explained away, or brought down to the level of man's comprehension, by such proud and corrupt, though specious, reasonings ; by acceding to these sentiments, I was, in my own opinion, in point of understanding and discernment, exalted to a superiority above the generality of mankind ; and I pleased myself in looking down with contempt upon such as were weak enough to believe the orthodox doctrines. Thus I generally soothed my conscience : and, if at any time I was uneasy at the apprehension that I did not thoroughly deserve eternal happiness, and was not entirely fit for heaven ; the same book afforded me a soft pillow on which to lull myself to sleep : it argued, and I then thought proved, that there were no eternal torments ; and it insinuated that there were *no* torments except for notorious sinners ; and that such as should just fall short of heaven would sink into their original nothing. With this welcome scheme I silenced all my fears ; and told my accusing conscience, that if I fell short of heaven I should be annihilated, and never be sensible of my loss.

By experience I am well acquainted with Satan's intention, in employing so many of his servants to invent and propagate those pestilential errors, whether in speculation, or as reduced to practice, that have in all ages corrupted and enervated the pure and powerful doctrine of the gospel : for they lead to forgetfulness of God and security in sin, and are deadly poison to every soul that imbibes them, unless a miracle of grace prevent. Such, on the one hand, are all the superstitious doctrines of popery ; purgatory, penances, absolutions, indulgences, merits of good works, and the acceptableness of will-worship and uncommanded observances. What are these but engines of the devil to keep men quiet in their sins ? Man, resolved to follow the dictates of his depraved inclination, and not to bound his pursuits and enjoyments by the limits of God's holy law, catches at any thing to soften the horrible thought of eternal misery. This is the awakening reflection, God's sword in the conscience, which it is Satan's business, by all his diabolical artifices, to endeavour to sheath, blunt, or turn aside ; knowing that, while this alarming apprehension is present

to the soul, he can never maintain possession of it in peace. By such inventions therefore as these, he takes care to furnish the sinner with that which he seeks, and to enable him to walk according to the course of this wicked world, and the desires of depraved nature, without being disturbed by such dreadful thoughts. The same, on the other hand, is the tendency of all those speculations of reasoning men, which set God's attributes at variance with each other ; which represent the Supreme Governor as so *weakly* merciful, that he regards neither the demands of his justice, the glory of his holiness, the veracity of his word, nor the peaceable order and subordination of the universe ; which explain away all the mysteries of the gospel ; and represent sin, that fruitful root of evil, that enemy of God, that favourite of Satan, as a very little thing, scarcely noticed by the Almighty ; and which, contrary to the scriptures, and to universal experience and observation, would persuade us that man is not a depraved creature.

To these latter sentiments I acceded, and maintained them as long as I could : and I did it, most assuredly, because they

soothed my conscience, freed me from the intolerable fears of damnation, and enabled me to think favourably of myself. For these reasons alone I loved and chose this ground : I fixed myself upon it, and there fortified myself by all the arguments and reasonings I could meet with. These things I wished to believe : and I had my wish ; for at length I did most confidently believe them. Being taken captive in this snare of Satan, I should here have perished with “ a lie in my right hand,” had not that Lord, whom I dishonoured, snatched me as a brand from the burning !

In this awful state of mind I attempted to obtain admission into holy orders ! Wrapt up in the proud notion of the dignity of human nature, I had lost sight of the evil of sin, and thought little of my own sinfulness ; I was filled with a self-important opinion of my own worth, and of the depth of my understanding : and I had adopted a system of religion accommodated to that foolish pride ; having almost wholly discarded mysteries from my creed, and regarding with sovereign contempt those who believed them. As far as I understood such controversies, I was nearly a Socinian

and Pelagian, and wholly an Arminian ;

[Possibly some readers may not fully understand the import of these terms ; and for their benefit I would observe, that the *Socinians* consider Christ as a mere man, and his death merely as an example of patience, and a confirmation of his doctrine ; and not as a real atonement satisfactory to divine justice for man's sins. They deny the deity and personality of the Holy Spirit, and do not admit that all Christians experience his renewing, sanctifying, and comforting influences : and they generally reject the doctrine of eternal punishments.—The *Pelagians* deny original sin, and explain away the scriptural history of the fall of man. They do not allow the total depravity of human nature, but account for the wickedness of the world from bad examples, habits, and education. They suppose men to possess an ability, both natural and moral, of becoming pious and holy, without a new creation or regeneration of the heart by the Holy Spirit : and they contend for the *freedom of the will*, not only as constituting us voluntary agents, accountable for our conduct, but as it consists in *exemption from the bondage of innate carnal propensities* ; so that man has in himself sufficient resources for his recovery to holiness by his own exertions.—The *Arminians* deny the doctrine of gratuitous personal election to eternal life, and of the final perseverance of all true believers : and numbers of them hold the doctrine of justification by works *in part at least* ; and verge in some degree to the Pelagian system, in respect of the first moving cause in the conversion of sinners.]

yet, to my shame be it spoken, I sought to obtain admission into the ministry, in a church whose doctrines are diametrically opposed to all the three ; without once concerning myself about those barriers which the wisdom of our forefathers has placed around her, purposely to prevent the intrusion of such dangerous heretics as I then was.

While I was preparing for this solemn office, I lived as before in known sin, and in utter neglect of prayer : my whole preparation consisting of nothing else than an attention to those studies which were more immediately requisite for reputably passing through the previous examination.

Thus, with a heart full of pride and wickedness ; my life polluted with many unrepented, unforsaken sins ; without one cry for mercy, one prayer for direction or assistance, or for a blessing upon what I was about to do ; after having concealed my real sentiments under the mask of general expressions ; after having subscribed articles directly contrary to what I believed ; and after having blasphemously declared, in the presence of God and of the congregation in the most solemn manner, sealing it with the Lord's supper, that I judged myself to be ' inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take that office upon me : ' (not knowing or believing that there was a Holy Ghost ;) on September the 20th, 1772, I was ordained a deacon.

For ever blessed be the God of all long-suffering and mercy, who had patience with such a rebel and blasphemer ; such an irre-

verent trifler with his Majesty : and such a presumptuous intruder into his sacred ministry ! I never think of this daring wickedness without being filled with amazement that I am out of hell ; without adoring that gracious God who permitted such an atrocious sinner to live, yea to serve him, and with acceptance, I trust, to call him father ; and as his minister to speak in his name. “ Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is
“ within me bless his holy name. Bless the
“ Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his
“ benefits : who forgiveth all thine iniqui-
“ ties, and healeth all thy diseases ; who re-
“ deemeth thy life from destruction ; who
“ crowneth thee with loving-kindness and
“ tender mercies.” May I fervently love, and very humbly and devotedly serve, that God who hath multiplied his mercies in abundantly pardoning my complicated provocations !

I had considerable difficulties to surmount in obtaining admission into the ministry, arising from my peculiar circumstances ; which rendered my conduct the more inexcusable : and my views, as far as I can ascertain them, were these three : a desire of a less laborious and more comfortable

way of procuring a livelihood, than otherwise I had the prospect of : the expectation of more leisure to employ in reading, of which I was inordinately fond : and a proud conceit of my abilities, with a vain-glorious imagination that I should some time distinguish and advance myself in the literary world. These were my ruling motives in taking this bold step : motives as opposite to those which should influence men to enter this sacred office as pride is opposite to humility, ambition to contentment in a low estate, and a willingness to be “ the least of all and the “ servant of all ;” as opposite as love of self, of the world, of filthy lucre, and of slothful ease, is to the love of God, of souls, and of the laborious work of the ministry. To me therefore be the shame of this heinous sin, and to God be all the glory of overruling it for good, I trust, both to unworthy me, and to his dear people, “ the church “ which he hath purchased with his own “ blood.”

My subsequent conduct was suitable to these motives. No sooner was I fixed in a curacy, than with close application I sat down to the study of the learned languages, and such other subjects as I considered

most needful in order to lay the foundation of my future advancement. And, oh that I were now as diligent in serving God, as I was then in serving self and ambition ! I spared no pains, I shunned, as much as I well could, all acquaintance and diversions, and retrenched from my usual hours of sleep, that I might keep more closely to this business. As a minister, I attended just enough to the public duties of my station to support a decent character, which I deemed subservient to my main design : and, from the same principle, I aimed at morality in my outward deportment, and affected seriousness in my conversation. As to the rest, I still lived in the practice of what I knew to be sinful, and in the entire neglect of all secret religion. If ever inclined to pray, conscious guilt stopped my mouth, and I seldom went further than, ‘ God be merciful unto me !’

Perceiving, however, that my Socinian principles were very disreputable, and being conscious from my own experience that they were unfavourable to morality, I concealed them in a great measure ; both for my credit’s sake, and from a sort of desire I entertained, subservient to my main de-

sign, of successfully inculcating the practice of the moral duties upon those to whom I preached. My studies indeed lay very little in divinity ; but this little all opposed that part of my scheme which respected the punishment of the wicked in the other world : and therefore (being now removed to a distance from those books whence I had imbibed my sentiments, and from the reasonings contained in them,) by which I had learned to defend them, I began gradually to be shaken in my former confidence, and once more to be under some apprehension of eternal misery. Being also statedly employed, with the appearance of solemnity, in the public worship of God, whilst I neglected and provoked him in secret, my conscience clamorously reproached me with base hypocrisy : and I began to conclude that, if eternal torments were reserved for any sinners, I certainly should be one of the number. Thus I was again filled with anxious fears and terrifying alarms : especially as I was continually meditating upon what might be the awful consequence, should I be called hence by sudden death. Even my close application to study could not soothe my conscience

nor quiet my fears ; and under the affected air of cheerfulness I was truly miserable.

This was my state of mind when the change I am about to relate began to take place. How it commenced ; in what manner, and by what steps, it proceeded ; and how it was completed ; will be the subject of the second part.—I shall conclude this by observing that, though staggered in my favourite sentiment before mentioned, and though my views of the person of Christ were verging towards Arianism ; yet in my other opinions I was more confirmed than ever. What those opinions were I have already briefly declared ; and they will occur again, and be more fully explained, as I proceed to relate the manner in which I was constrained to renounce them, one after another, and to accede to those that were directly contrary to them. Let it suffice to say, that I was full of proud self-sufficiency, very positive, and very obstinate ; and, being situated in the neighbourhood of some of those whom the world calls *Methodists*, I joined in the prevailing sentiment ; held them in sovereign contempt, spoke of them with derision ; declaimed against them from the pulpit, as persons

full of bigotry, enthusiasm, and spiritual pride ; laid heavy things to their charge ; and endeavoured to prove the doctrines, which I supposed them to hold, (for I had never read their books,) to be dishonourable to God, and destructive to morality. And, though in some companies I chose to conceal part of my sentiments, and in all affected to speak as a friend to universal toleration ; yet scarcely any person can be more proudly and violently prejudiced against both their persons and principles, than I then was.

Methodist, as a stigma of reproach, was first applied to Mr. Wesley, Mr. Whitefield, and their followers ; to those who, professing an attachment to our established church, and disclaiming the name of dissenters, were not conformists in point of parochial order, but had separate seasons, places, and assemblies for worship. The term has since been extended by many to all persons, whether clergy or laity, who preach or profess the doctrines of the reformation, as expressed in the articles and liturgy of our church. For this fault they must all submit to bear the reproachful name, especially the ministers ; nor will the most regular and peaceable compliance with the injunctions of the rubric exempt them from it, if they avow the authorized, but in great measure exploded, doctrines to which they have subscribed. My acquaintance hitherto has been solely with Methodists of the latter description ; and I have them alone in view when I use the term.

PART II.

A history of the change which has taken place in the Author's sentiments : with the manner in which, and the manner by which, it was at length effected.

IN January 1774, two of my parishioners, a man and his wife, lay at the point of death. I had heard of the circumstance, but, according to my general custom, not being sent for, I took no notice of it ; till one evening, the woman being now dead and the man dying, I heard that my neighbour, the Rev. Mr. Newton,¹ had been several times to visit them. Immediately my conscience reproached me with being shamefully negligent, in sitting at home within a few doors of dying persons, my general hearers, and never going to visit them. Directly it occurred to me, that, whatever contempt I

¹ The Rev. John Newton, afterwards rector of St. Mary Woolnoth's, Lombard-Street, London. He had been curate of Olney, somewhat more than a mile from Weston, since his ordination in 1764, and continued such until his removal to London at the end of the year 1779. The name has hitherto stood blank (Mr. —) in this publication.

might have for Mr. N.'s doctrines, I must acknowledge his practice to be more consistent with the ministerial character than my own. He must have more zeal and love for souls than I had, or he would not have walked so far to visit, and supply my lack of care to those who, as far as I was concerned, might have been left to perish in their sins.

This reflection affected me so much, that without delay, and very earnestly, yea with tears, I besought the Lord to forgive my past neglect ; and resolved thenceforth to be more attentive to this duty : which resolution, though at first formed in ignorant dependence on my own strength, I have by divine grace been enabled hitherto to keep.— I went immediately to visit the survivor : and the affecting sight of one person already dead, and another expiring in the same chamber, served more deeply to impress my serious convictions : so that from that time I have constantly visited the sick of my parishes, as far as I have had opportunity ; and have endeavoured, to the best of my knowledge, to perform that essential part of a parish minister's duty.

Of the two poor persons, at Weston, here referred

to, Mr. S. says in a letter to one of his sisters, dated January 25, 1774,—“ Last Friday night I did what in all probability I shall never do more, should it please God to prolong my life to the usual standard of man : I buried a man and his wife in one grave ; the former 68 years of age, the latter 69. They had been married and lived comfortably together 44 years. They always wished to die together : one died on Monday, the other on Wednesday : two persons, of good character and very regular lives. Had either survived, he or she must have been very unhappy, as they were both infirm.” It may be observed that this letter, though long and confidential, gives no hint of the serious impression which had been made upon the writer’s mind by Mr. Newton’s example. Religion, as a matter of personal feeling, had not yet become the subject of correspondence between Mr. S. and his friends.

Some time after this, a friend recommended to my perusal the conclusion of Bishop Burnet’s ‘ History of his own Time,’ especially that part which respects the clergy. It had the intended effect : I was considerably instructed and impressed by it. I was convinced that my entrance into the ministry had been the result of very wrong motives, was preceded by a very unsuitable preparation, and accompanied with very improper conduct. Some uneasiness was also excited in my mind concerning my neglect of the important duties of that high calling : and, though I was enslaved by sin, and too much engaged in other studies, and in love with this present world, to relinquish my flattering pursuit of reputation and prefer-

ment, and to change the course of my life, studies, and employments ; yet, at intervals, I experienced desires and purposes, at some future period, of devoting myself wholly to the work of the ministry, in the manner to which he exhorts the clergy.

All these things increased the clamorous remonstrances of my conscience ; and at this time I lived without any secret religion, because, without some reformation in my conduct as a man and a minister, I did not dare to pray. My convictions would no longer be silenced or appeased ; and they became so intolerably troublesome, that I resolved to make one more effort towards amendment. In good earnest, and not totally without seeking the assistance of the Lord by prayer, I now attempted to break the chains, with which Satan had hitherto held my soul in bondage : and it pleased the Lord that I should obtain some considerable advantages. Part of my grosser defilements I was enabled to relinquish, and to enter upon a form of devotion. *Formal* enough indeed it was in some respects ; for I neither knew that Mediator through whom, nor that Spirit by whom, prayers are offered with acceptance unto the Father : yet, though

utterly in the dark as to the true and living way to the throne of grace, I am persuaded there were even then seasons when I was enabled to rise above a mere form, and to offer petitions so far *spiritual* as to be accepted and answered.

I was now somewhat reformed in my outward conduct; but “the renewing in “the spirit of my mind,” if begun, was scarcely discernible. As my life was externally less wicked and ungodly, my heart grew more proud; the idol *self* was the object of my adoration and obeisance; my worldly advancement was more eagerly sought than ever; some flattering prospects seemed to open, and I resolved to improve my advantages to the uttermost. At the same time every thing tended to increase my good opinion of myself: I was treated with kindness and friendship by persons from whom I had no reason to expect it; my preaching was well received; my acquaintance seemed to be courted; and my foolish heart verily believed that all this and much more was due to my superior worth: while conscience, which, by its mortifying accusations, had been useful to preserve some sense of unworthiness in my

mind, was now silenced, or seemed to authorize that pride which it had before checked. And, having the disadvantage of conversing in general with persons who either favoured my sentiments, or from good manners, or because they saw it would be in vain, did not contradict me ; I concluded that my scheme of doctrine was the exact standard of truth, and that by my superior abilities I was capable of confuting, or convincing, all who were otherwise minded. In this view of the matter I felt an eager desire of entering into a religious controversy, especially with a Calvinist : for many resided in the neighbourhood, and I heard various reports concerning their tenets.

It was at this time that my correspondence with Mr. Newton commenced. At a visitation, in May 1775, we exchanged a few words, on a controverted subject, in the room among the clergy : which I believe drew many eyes upon us. At that time he prudently declined the discourse ; but a day or two after he sent me a short note with a little book for my perusal. This was the very thing I wanted : and I gladly embraced the opportunity which, according to my wishes, seemed now to offer—God knoweth,

with no inconsiderable expectations that my arguments would prove irresistibly convincing, and that I should have the honour of rescuing a well-meaning person from his enthusiastic delusions.

I had indeed by this time conceived a very favourable opinion of him, and a sort of respect for him ; being acquainted with the character he sustained even among some persons who expressed a disapprobation of his doctrines. They were forward to commend him as a benevolent, disinterested, inoffensive person, and a laborious minister. But, on the other hand, I looked upon his religious sentiments as rank fanaticism : and entertained a very contemptible opinion of his abilities, natural and acquired. Once I had the curiosity to hear him preach : and, not understanding his sermon, I made a very great jest of it, where I could do it without giving offence. I had also read one of his publications ; but, for the same reason, I thought the greater part of it whimsical, paradoxical, and unintelligible.

This was in the year 1773, while Mr. S. resided at Stoke. Mr. N.'s text (which came in course,) happened to be concerning Elymas the sorcerer, *O full of all subtlety and all mischief, &c.* (Acts xiii. 9, 10.) Mr. S., knowing that Mr. N. preached *extempore*, concluded that it had been chosen on

purpose, and that the discourse was pointed at him—which “neither alarmed nor irritated him, but served him as a subject of merriment.”—Life, p. 62—64.

Concealing therefore the true motives of my conduct under the offer of friendship, and a professed desire to know the truth, (which, amidst all my self-sufficiency and prejudice, I trust the Lord had even then given me ;) with the greatest affectation of candour, and of a mind open to conviction, I wrote him a long letter ; purposing to draw from him such an avowal and explanation of his sentiments, as might introduce a controversial discussion of our religious differences. The event by no means answered my expectation. He returned a very friendly and long answer to my letter ; in which he carefully avoided the mention of those doctrines which he knew would offend me. He declared that he believed me to be one who feared God, and was under the teaching of His Holy Spirit ; that he gladly accepted my offer of friendship, and was no ways inclined to dictate to me ; but that, leaving me to the guidance of the Lord, he would be glad, as occasion served, from time to time, to bear testimony to the truths of the gospel, and to communicate his sentiments to me on any subject, with all the confidence of friendship.

In this manner our correspondence began ; and it was continued, in the interchange of nine or ten letters, till December the same year. Throughout I held my purpose, and he his. I made use of every endeavour to draw him into controversy ; and filled my letters with definitions, inquiries, arguments, objections, and consequences ; requiring explicit answers. He, on the other hand, shunned every thing controversial as much as possible, and filled his letters with the most useful and least offensive instructions ; except that now and then he dropped hints concerning the necessity, the true nature, and the efficacy, of faith, and the manner in which it was to be sought and obtained ; and concerning some other matters suited, as he judged, to help me forward in my inquiry after truth. But they much offended my prejudices, afforded me matter of disputation, and at that time were of little use to me.

This however is certain, that through the whole of the correspondence I disputed with all the arguments I could devise, against almost every thing which he advanced ; and was very much nettled at many things that he asserted. I read great part of his letters,

and some books which he sent me, with much indifference and contempt. I construed his declining controversy into an acknowledgment of weakness, and triumphed in many companies as having confuted his arguments. And finally, when I could not obtain my end, at my instance the correspondence was dropped.

His letters and my answers are now by me ; and on a careful perusal of them, compared with all I can recollect concerning this matter, I give this as a faithful account of the correspondence.¹ His letters will, I hope, shortly be made public, being such

¹ The earlier editions here add, " though different from what " has been represented." I presume they relate to the idea which has always prevailed, that Mr. S.'s intercourse with Mr. N. was the primary means of leading the former to his new views of religious truth. This is not the view given in this place, or in his memoir of himself inserted in his Life. His own statement always was, that the chief benefits which he derived from Mr. N. were *after* he had come to some agreement with him in sentiment. " His usefulness to me," he observes in a subsequent part of this work, " has all along been " in those matters in which we were in some measure agreed, " not in those in which we differed ; for, as to these, my proud " heart scorned to have him for a teacher." " After" the sermon which has been mentioned above, Mr. S. says, " I never " heard Mr. N. preach, till my creed accorded with his in all " the great outlines."

The letters of Mr. N.'s, respecting which the hope is here expressed that they would be made public, are the " Eight " letters to the Rev. Mr. S— ;" printed in Newton's *Cardiphonia*, vol. i.

as promise greater advantage to others, than, through my proud contentious spirit, I experienced from them. Mine deserve only to be forgotten, except as they are useful to me to remind me what I was, and to mortify my pride ; as they illustrate my friend's patience and candour, in so long bearing with my ignorance and arrogance, and, notwithstanding my unteachable quarrelsome temper, continuing his benevolent labours for my good ; and especially as they remind me of the goodness of God, who, though he abominates and "resists the proud," yet knows how to bring down the stout heart, not only by the iron rod of his wrath, but by the golden sceptre of his grace.

Thus our correspondence and acquaintance, for the present, were almost wholly broken off ; for a long time we seldom met, and then only interchanged a few words on general topics of conversation. Yet he all along persevered in telling me, to my no small offence, that I should one day accede to his religious principles ; that he had stood on my ground, and that I should stand on his : and he constantly informed his friends, that, though slowly, I was surely feeling my way to the knowledge of the

truth. So clearly could he discern the dawnings of grace in my soul, amidst all the darkness of depraved nature, and my obstinate rebellion against the will of God !

This expectation was principally grounded on my conduct in the following circumstances. Immediately after the commencement of our correspondence in May 1775, whilst my thoughts were much engrossed by some hopes of preferment ;¹ one Sunday during the time of divine service, when the psalm to be sung was named, I opened the prayer-book to turn to it : but (*accidentally*, shall I say, or *providentially* ?) I opened upon the Articles of religion ; and the eighth, respecting the authority and warrant of the *Athanasian* creed, immediately engaged my attention. My disbelief of the doctrine of a Trinity of coequal persons in the unity of the Godhead, and my pretensions to candour, had both combined to excite my hatred to this creed ; for which reason I had been accustomed to speak of it with contempt, and to neglect reading it

¹ Mr. S.'s expectations of preferment were chiefly from George Wrighte, Esq., of Gayhurst, Bucks ; from whose family he had married a lady much esteemed in it, and who evinced much desire to serve Mr. S.

officially. No sooner therefore did I read the words, that it was ‘to be thoroughly received, and believed, for that it might be proved by most certain warrants of holy scripture,’ than my mind was greatly impressed and affected. The matter of subscription immediately occurred to my thoughts ; and from that moment I conceived such scruples about it, that, till my view of the whole system of Christianity was entirely changed, they remained insuperable.

Mr. S.’s sentiments concerning the Athanasian creed at a later period are thus given in a letter dated April 5, 1818.—
“I have little objection to the doctrine, or to the spirit of the
“Athanasian creed. Properly understood, it only pronounces
“the damnatory sentence on those whom the scripture con-
“demns ; and this only in a *declarative* way, not as *denouncing*
“them, or *imprecating* evil upon them.”

It is wisely said by the son of Sirach,
‘My son, if thou come to serve the Lord,
‘prepare thy soul for temptation.’ I had twice before subscribed these articles, with the same religious sentiments which I now entertained. But, conscience being asleep, and the service of the Lord no part of my concern, I considered subscription as a matter of course, a necessary form, and very little troubled myself about it. But now, though I was greatly influenced by pride, ambition, and the love of the world ;

yet my heart was sincerely towards the Lord, and I dared not to venture on a known sin, deliberately, for the sake of temporal interest. *Subscription to articles which I did not believe, paid as a price for church-preferment, I began to look upon as an impious lie, a heinous guilt, that could never truly be repented of without throwing back the wages of iniquity.* The more I pondered it, the more strenuously my conscience protested against it. At length, after a violent conflict between interest and conscience, I made known to my patron my scruples, and my determination not to subscribe. Thus my views of preferment were deliberately given up, and with an increasing family I was left, as far as mere human prudence could discern, with little other prospect than that of poverty and distress. My objections to the articles were, as I now see, groundless : much self-sufficiency, undue warmth of temper, and obstinacy, were betrayed in the management of this affair, for which I ought to be humbled ; but my adherence to the dictates of my conscience, “ and holding fast my integrity ” in such trying circumstances, I never did, and I trust never shall, repent.

In Mr. S.'s Life some long and important letters are given, written just in the crisis of the severe conflicts here alluded to ; and from them some extracts may be inserted in this place.— July 12, 1775, he writes to one of his sisters : “ Within sight, “ as it were, of preferment, I have met with what has put “ a period to my present expectations, and has caused me “ formally to renounce them. This is the trial that is “ now upon me. If by subscription be meant an avowed “ assent to the truth of every proposition contained in what “ we subscribe, I can never subscribe these Articles without “ telling a most audacious lie, in the face of God, in a solemn “ and important matter of religion, for the sake of sordid lucre. “ Such a lie would wound my conscience, and forfeit *his* “ favour, *in whose favour is life* ; and riches would make me “ but a poor amends. On the other hand, if I resolve not to “ subscribe, I must at present renounce all my aspiring hopes, “ and be content to be a poor, and perhaps despised, curate, “ and censured into the bargain. But yet this is the far better “ side of the question. I have therefore chosen this side, “ and hope, by God’s assistance, to persevere therein. I “ am at present very composed, and resigned to my disap- “ pointment. At first I was sadly agitated ; which was “ increased by the warm censures I received.”

To another sister a day or two after ;—“ For several days “ I was almost baited out of my life. All manner of accusa- “ tions were heaped upon me : vanity, hypocrisy, obstinacy, “ &c. But such arguments were made use of, as “ shewed me the weakness of the cause that needed them. “ Conscience, religion, providence, a future state, were made “ a jest of. But I was bold, and did not betray the cause “ of God and religion ; but preached them some such sermons “ (I mean in conversation) as they never before heard, I “ think. These censures, added to the trial of relin- “ quishing all my fond hopes, and renouncing my worldly “ interests, and aggravated by all the terrors by which, in the “ day of trial, every thing is magnified, were well nigh more “ than I could bear. But, by God Almighty’s assistance, to “ whom I applied for direction and support, in a manner that, “ I hope, was acceptable through His mercy, I soon composed “ my agitated mind, and reduced it to a state of resigned “ acquiescence in His will, and trust in His promises. “ In adherence to the cause which I think good, I am ready “ to resign all my worldly expectations, and *to sell all that*

" *I have, take up my cross, and follow my Lord and Master.*
 " To this state of calm composure I have arrived chiefly by
 " reading the Gospels," &c.

October 15th following, he says to the former of these correspondents : " You seem afraid that I should lose all this
 " world's goods. Remember our Saviour's words, *Whosoever*
 " *he be that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My*
 " *disciple* : that is, if he be not *ready* to forsake all that he
 " hath, when his duty requires it. Not that I have any reason
 " to apprehend I am likely to be put to that severe trial.....
 " What think you of what our Lord says, *But seek ye FIRST the*
 " *kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things*
 " *shall be added unto you ?* Dare you believe this promise
 " or not ? I DARE ; and will act accordingly, by God's
 " assistance."

No sooner was my determination known, than I was severely censured by many of my friends. They all, I am sensible, did it from kindness, and they used arguments of various kinds, none of which were suited to produce conviction. But, though I was confirmed in my resolution by the reasonings used to induce me to alter it, they at length were made instrumental in bringing me to this important determination ; *Not so to believe what any man said, as to take it upon his authority : but to search the word of God with this single intention, to discover whether the Articles of the Church of England in general, were, or were not, agreeable to the Scriptures.* I had studied the sacred writings in some measure before, for the

sake of becoming acquainted with the original languages, and in order thence to bring detached texts to support my own system ; and I had a tolerable acquaintance with the historical and preceptive parts of them : but I had not searched this precious depository of divine knowledge, with the express design of discovering the truth in controverted matters of doctrine. I had very rarely been troubled with suspicions that I was or might be mistaken : and I now rather thought of becoming better qualified upon scriptural grounds to defend my determination, than of being led to any change of sentiments.

However, I set about the inquiry ; and the first passage, as I remember, which made me suspect that I might be wrong, was James i. 5 : “ If any of you lack wisdom, “ let him ask of God, who giveth to all “ men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it “ shall be given him.” On considering these words with some attention, I became conscious that, though I had thought myself wise, yet assuredly I had obtained none of my wisdom in this manner ; for I had never offered one prayer to that effect during the whole course of my life. I also perceived

that this text contained a suitable direction, and an encouraging promise, in my present inquiry ; and from this time, in my poor manner, I began to ask God to give me this promised wisdom.

Shortly after, I meditated on, and preached from John vii. 16, 17 : “ My doctrine is not
“ mine, but His that sent me : if any man
“ will do His will, he shall know of the doc-
“ trine whether it be of God, or whether I
“ speak of myself.” I was surprised that I had not before attended to such remarkable words. I discovered that they contained a direction and a promise, calculated to serve as a clew in extricating the sincere inquirer after truth, from that labyrinth of controversy in which, at his first setting out, he is likely to be bewildered. And, though my mind was too much leavened with the pride of reasoning, to reap that benefit from this precious text, which it is capable of affording to the soul that is humbly willing to be taught of God ; yet, being conscious that I was disposed to risk every thing in doing what I thought his will, I was encouraged with the assurance that, if I were under a mistake, I should some time discover it.

I was further led to suspect that I might

possibly be wrong, because I had not hitherto sought the truth in the proper manner, by attending to Proverbs iii. 5, 6 : “ Trust in
“ the Lord with all thine heart, and lean
“ not to thine own understanding : in all
“ thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall
“ direct thy paths.” I could not but know that I had not hitherto “ trusted in the Lord
“ with all my heart,” nor “ acknowledged
“ Him in all my ways,” nor depended on His directions in all my paths ; but that, in my religious speculations, I had leaned wholly to my own understanding.

But, though these and some other passages made for the present a great impression upon me, and influenced me to make it a part of my daily prayers, that I might be directed to a right understanding of the word of God ; yet my pride and propensity to controversy had, as some desperate disease, infected my whole soul, and was not to be cured all at once. I was very far indeed from being “ a little child,” sitting humbly and simply at the Lord’s feet, to learn from Him the very first rudiments of divine knowledge. I had yet no abiding suspicion that all which I had heretofore accounted wisdom was foolishness, and must be unlearned,

and “counted loss,” before I could attain to the excellency of the true knowledge of Jesus Christ : for, though I began to allow it probable that in some few matters I might have been in error, yet I still was confident that in the main my scheme of doctrine was true. When I was pressed with objections and arguments against any of my sentiments, and when doubts began to arise in my mind ; to put off the uneasiness occasioned by them, my constant practice was, to recollect, as far as I could, all the reasonings and interpretations of scripture, on the other side of the question : and, when this failed of affording satisfaction, I had recourse to controversial writings. This drew me aside from the pure word of God, rendered me more remiss and formal in prayer, and furnished me with defensive armour against my convictions, with fuel for my passions, and food for my pride and self-sufficiency.

At this time Locke’s ‘Reasonableness of Christianity,’ with his ‘Vindications’ of it, became my favourite pieces of divinity. I studied this, and many other of Mr. Locke’s works, with great attention, and a sort of bigotted fondness ; taking him almost im-

plicitly for my master, adopting his conclusions, borrowing many of his arguments, and imbibing a dislike to such persons as would not agree with me in my partiality for him. This was of great disservice to me ; as, instead of getting forward in my inquiry after truth, I thence collected more ingenious and specious arguments with which to defend my mistakes.¹

But one book which I read at this time, because mentioned with approbation by Mr. Locke, was of singular use to me : this was Bishop Burnet's ' Pastoral Care.' I found little in it that offended my prejudices, and many things which came home to my conscience respecting my ministerial obligations. A few short extracts I shall lay before the reader, of such passages as were most affecting to my own mind. Having mentioned the question proposed

¹ After having spoken so freely of Mr. Locke's divinity, which I once so highly esteemed, it seems but just to acknowledge the vast obligation which the whole religious world is under to that great man for his ' Letters concerning Toleration,' and his answers to those who wrote against them. The grounds of religious liberty, and the reasons why every one should be left to his own choice, to worship God according to his conscience, were, perhaps, never *generally* understood since the foundation of the world, till by these publications Mr. Locke unanswerably made them manifest.

to those who are about to be ordained deacons, ‘ Do you trust that you are inwardly
‘ moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon
‘ you this office and ministry, to serve God
‘ for the promoting of his glory, and the
‘ edifying of his people ?’ he adds, page 111,)
‘ Certainly the answer that is made to this
‘ ought to be well considered : for if any one
‘ says, ‘ I trust so,’ that yet knows nothing
‘ of any such motion, and can give no
‘ account of it, he lies to the Holy Ghost,
‘ and makes his first approach to the altar
‘ with a lie in his mouth, and that not to
‘ men but to God.’ And again, (page 112,)
‘ Shall not He [God] reckon with those
‘ who dare to run without his mission, pre-
‘ tending *that they trust they have it*, when
‘ perhaps they understand not the import-
‘ ance of it ; nay, and perhaps some laugh
‘ at it, as an enthusiastical question, who
‘ yet will go through with the office ! They
‘ come to Christ for the loaves ; they hope
‘ to live by the altar and the gospel, how
‘ little soever they serve at the one, or preach
‘ the other ; therefore they will say any
‘ thing that is necessary for qualifying them
‘ to this, whether true or false.’

Again, (page 122,) having interwoven a

great part of the excellent office of the ordination of priests into his argument, concerning the importance and weight of the work of the ministry, he adds : ‘ Upon the
‘ whole matter, either this is all a piece of
‘ gross and impudent pageantry, dressed up
‘ in grave and lofty expressions, to strike
‘ upon the weaker part of mankind, and to
‘ furnish the rest with matter to their profane and impious scorn : or it must be
‘ confessed that priests come under the most
‘ formal and express engagements to constant and diligent labour, that can be
‘ possibly contrived or set forth in words.’ He concludes this subject of the ordination-offices, by exhorting all candidates for orders to read them frequently and attentively during the time of their preparation, that they may be aware before-hand of the obligation which they are about so solemnly to enter into ; and to peruse them at least four times in a year ever after their ordination, to keep in their minds a continual remembrance of their important engagements. How necessary this counsel is, every minister, or candidate for the ministry, must determine for himself. For my part, I had never once read the office through when I

was ordained, and was in a great measure a stranger to the obligations under which I was about to enter, till the very period ; nor did I ever afterwards attend to it till this advice put me upon it. The shameful negligence, and extreme absurdity, of my conduct in this respect are too glaring, not to be perceived with self-application by every one who has been guilty of a similar omission. I would therefore only just mention, that hearty earnest prayer to God, for his guidance, help, and blessing, may be suitably recommended, as a proper attendant on such a perusal of our obligations.

Again, (page 147,) he thus speaks of a wicked clergyman : ‘ His whole life has been
‘ a course of hypocrisy, in the strictest sense
‘ of the word, which is the acting of a part,
‘ and the counterfeiting another person.
‘ His sins have in them all possible aggravations : they are against knowledge, and
‘ against vows, and contrary to his character ; they carry in them a deliberate
‘ contempt of all the truths and obligations
‘ of religion ; and, if he perishes, he does
‘ not perish alone, but carries a shoal down
‘ with him, either of those who have perished
‘ in ignorance through his neglect, or of

‘ those who have been hardened in their
‘ sins through his ill-example.’—Again,
(page 183,) having copiously discoursed on
the studies befitting ministers, especially the
study of the Scriptures, he adds : ‘ But to
‘ give all these their full effect, a priest that
‘ is much in his study, ought to employ a
‘ great part of his time in secret and fervent
‘ prayer, for the direction and blessing of
‘ God in his labours, for the constant assist-
‘ ance of His Holy Spirit, and for a lively
‘ sense of divine matters ; that so he may
‘ feel the impressions of them grow deep
‘ and strong upon his thoughts : this, and
‘ this only, will make him go on with his
‘ work without wearying, and be always
‘ rejoicing in it.’

But the chief benefit which accrued to me
from the perusal of the book was this :
I was excited by it to an attentive considera-
tion of those Scriptures that state the obliga-
tions and duties of a minister, which hitherto
I had not observed, or to which I had very
loosely attended. In particular, (it is yet
fresh in my memory,) I was greatly affected
with considering the charge of precious
souls committed to me, and the awful
account one day to be rendered of them, in

meditating on Ezek. xxxiii. 7—9 : “ So thou,
“ O son of man, I have set thee a watchman
“ unto the house of Israel : therefore, thou
“ shalt hear the word at my mouth, and
“ warn them from me. When I say unto
“ the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt
“ surely die ; if thou dost not speak to warn
“ the wicked from his way, that wicked man
“ shall die in his iniquity, but his blood
“ will I require at thine hand. Never-
“ theless, if thou warn the wicked of his
“ way, to turn from it ; if he do not
“ turn from his way, he shall die in his
“ iniquity ; but thou hast delivered thy
“ soul.” I was fully convinced, with Bishop
Burnet, that every minister is as much con-
cerned in this solemn warning, as the pro-
phet himself was.—Acts xx. 17—35, was
another portion of Scripture which, by
means of this book, was brought home to
my conscience ; especially ver. 26, 27, 28,
which serve as an illustration of the Scrip-
ture just quoted : “ Wherefore I take you
“ to record this day that I am pure from
“ the blood of all men ; for I have not
“ shunned to declare unto you all the counsel
“ of God. Take heed, therefore, unto
“ yourselves, and to all the flock, over

“ which the Holy Ghost hath made you
“ overseers, to feed the church of God which
“ he hath purchased with His own blood.”

In short, I was put upon the attentive and repeated perusal of the Epistles to Timothy and Titus, as containing the sum of a minister's duty in all ages. I searched out and carefully considered every text that I could find in the whole scripture which referred to this argument. I was greatly impressed by 1 Cor. ix. 16 : “ For necessity is laid upon me ; yea, wo is me if I
“ preach not the gospel.” Nor was I less struck with Coloss. iv. 17 : “ Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which
“ thou hast received in the Lord, that thou
“ fulfil it.” This was brought to my conscience with power, as if the apostle had in person spoken the words to me. But especially I was both instructed and encouraged by meditating on 1 Peter v. 2—4 :
“ Feed the flock of God which is among
“ you, taking the oversight thereof not by
“ constraint, but willingly ; not for filthy
“ lucre, but of a ready mind ; neither as
“ being lords over God's heritage, but being
“ ensamples to the flock : and, when the
“ chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall

“ receive a crown of glory that fadeth
“ not away.”

I hope the reader will excuse my prolixity in speaking on this subject, because in itself it is very important ; and, though I obtained no new views of gospel-truth from the ‘ Pastoral Care,’ yet I received such a deep conviction of the difficulty and importance of that work in which I had thoughtlessly engaged, and of the imminent danger to which my soul would be exposed should I neglect to devote myself wholly to it ; as laid the foundation of all my subsequent conduct and change of sentiments. I was, indeed, guilty of very criminal procrastination after I had been thus convinced ; and, being engaged more than I ought in other matters, I for some time postponed and neglected complying with the dictates of my conscience. But I never lost sight of the instruction which I had received, nor ever enjoyed any comfortable reflection, till, having broken off all other engagements, I had given myself up to those studies and duties which pertain to the work of the ministry. And I have cause to bless God that this book ever came in my way.

Still, however, my self-confidence was

very little abated, and I had made no progress in acquiring the knowledge of the truth. I next read Tillotson's Sermons and Jortin's works : and, my time being otherwise engaged, I for a while gave into the indolent custom of transcribing their discourses, with some alterations, to preach to my people. This precluded free meditation on the word of God, and led me to take up my opinions on trust. My preaching was in general that smooth palatable mixture of law and gospel, which corrupts both ; by representing the gospel as a *mitigated law*, and as accepting *sincere* instead of *perfect obedience*. This system, by flattering pride and prejudice, and soothing the conscience, pleases the careless sinner and self-righteous formalist, but does real good to none ; and is in fact a specious, fatal, but unsuspected, kind of antinomianism.

About this time I foolishly engaged in a course of diversion and visiting, more than I had done since my ordination : this unfitted me for secret prayer and close meditation, and rendered the scriptures, and other religious studies, insipid and irksome to me ; a never-failing consequence of every vain compliance with the world. For a

season, therefore, my ardour was damped, my anxiety banished, and my inquiries retarded. I was not, however, permitted entirely to drop my religious pursuits : generally I made it a rule to read something in the scriptures every day, and to perform a task of daily devotion ; but in both I was very formal and lifeless.

Yet not long after I was engaged in earnest meditation on our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus, John iii. I felt an anxious desire to understand this interesting portion of scripture ; especially to know what it was to be " born again," or " born of the " Spirit," which in five verses our Saviour has three times declared absolutely necessary to salvation. I was convinced it was absurd to suppose that such strong expressions implied no more than baptism with water. Tillotson's controversial sermons on this subject afforded me no satisfaction. Some great and total change I supposed to be intended, not only in the behaviour, but also in the heart. But, not having clearly experienced that change, I could not understand in what it consisted. However, having offered some poor prayers for divine teaching, I undertook to preach upon it :

but I talked very darkly ; employed a considerable part of my time in declaiming against visionaries and enthusiasts ; and reaped very little benefit from it. Yet I was so well satisfied with my performance, that, in the course of my correspondence with Mr. Newton, I sent him these sermons for his perusal : and he, in return, sent me some of his own upon the same subject. But, though sincerely desirous to understand our Lord's meaning in this important point, I was too proud to be taught by *him*. I cast my eye therefore carelessly over some of them, and then returned the manuscript, without closely attending to any thing contained in it.

Nothing material occurred after this till the next spring, 1776 : when I was induced by what I had learned from Bishop Burnet, to establish a lecture once a week in one of my parishes, for expounding the scriptures. This brought many passages, which I had not before observed, under my attentive consideration ; and afforded my reflecting mind abundance of employment, in attempting to reconcile them with each other, and with my scheme of doctrine.

Little progress however had been made,

when in May 1776 I heard a dignified clergyman, in a visitation sermon, recommend Mr. Soame Jenyns's *View of the Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion*. In consequence of this recommendation I perused it, and not without profit. The truth and importance of the gospel-revelation appeared with convincing evidence to my understanding, and came with efficacy to my heart, by reading this book. I received from it more distinct heart-affecting views of the design of God in this revelation of himself, than I had before ; and I was put upon much serious reflection, and earnest prayer to be led to, or established in, the truth, concerning the nature and reality of the atonement by the death of Christ : for hitherto I had been in this respect a Socinian, or very little better. But, to counterbalance this advantage, Dr. Clarke's *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity*, and the controversy which ensued upon its publication, became a favourite part of my study. The Arian scheme is so inconsistent with reason, that, when reflecting men, in order to avoid those mysterious, and, as they imagine, unreasonable conclusions, which, according to the true meaning of the words,

the scriptures contain, have become Arians, it is wonderful they do not, for the same cause, embrace the Socinian system. This is the natural progress of unhumbled reason ; from Arianism to Socinianism, from Socinianism to Deism, and thence to Atheism. Many and awful have been the examples of reasoning and learned men, who, under the name of philosophers, arrogating to themselves the prerogative of superior discernment, have manifested the propriety with which they claimed this pre-eminence, by treading this down-hill road, almost, if not quite, to the very bottom.

But, when a man has fallen so low as Socinianism, not merely for want of information, or by blindly and implicitly adopting the sentiments of other men, but by “ leaning “ to his own understanding,” and preferring the conclusions of his own reason to the infallible dictates of the Holy Ghost ; it is not common for him to return gradually, by the retrograde path, first to Arianism, and then to the received doctrine of the Trinity. Yet this was my case. Dr. Clarke appeared to me so undeniably to establish his argument by express scriptural evidences, and so plausibly to defend his system on

both sides, and to back his cause with so many seeming authorities ; that I found myself unable any longer to maintain my Socinian principles, and I was constrained to relinquish them as untenable. At the same time I was not aware of the flaw in his reasoning, and of the unavoidable consequence of his middle doctrine ; namely, that the Son and Holy Spirit, however exalted and dignified with names and titles, must either be mere creatures, or that otherwise there must be three Gods. Not perceiving this, and my newly acquired reverence for scripture, and my old self-confidence and fondness for reasoning being, by this conciliating scheme, both gratified ; I cordially acceded to his sentiments, and for a long time could not endure any other doctrine.

Nothing further of any consequence occurred till about December 1776, when, carelessly taking up Mr. Law's Serious Call, a book I had hitherto treated with contempt, I had no sooner opened it, than I was struck with the originality of the work, and the spirit and force of argument with which it is written. I mean merely as to his management of the subjects of which he treats ; for there are many things in it that

I am very far from approving ; and it certainly contains as little *gospel*, as any religious work I am acquainted with. But, though a very uncomfortable book to a person who is brought under a serious concern for his soul, and deep conviction of sin ; it is very useful to prepare the way, to shew the need that we have of a Saviour, and to enforce the practice of that holy diligence in the use of means, which the important interests of eternity reasonably demand. This was its use to me. By the perusal of it I was convinced that I was guilty of great remissness and negligence ; that the duties of secret devotion called for far more of my time and attention, than had been hitherto allotted to them ; and that, if I hoped to save my own soul, and the souls of those who heard me, I must in this respect greatly alter my conduct, and increase my diligence in seeking and serving the Lord. From that time I began to study in what manner my devotions might be rendered more fervent and pertinent. I transcribed, and committed to memory, scriptural petitions ; I employed some time in reading manuals of devotion ; made attempts to compose prayers myself ; and became more frequent and

earnest, and I trust, more spiritual than heretofore, in my secret addresses to the Majesty of Heaven.

About this time, after many delays, I complied with the admonition of my conscience, and disengaged myself from all other employments, with a solemn resolution to leave all my temporal concerns in the hands of the Lord, and entirely to devote myself to the work of the ministry. Being thus become master of all my time, I dropped every other study, and turned the whole current of my reflections and inquiries into another channel ; and for several years I scarcely opened a book which treated of any thing besides religion.¹

The first step I took, after this disengagement, was to keep common-place books. One I had for noting down remarkable passages out of other authors ; and another for collecting into one view every text which I could meet with in scripture, re-

¹ “ I solemnly vowed before God,” Mr. S. says in his memoir, “ never more to engage in any pursuit, study, or publication, which should not be evidently subservient to my ministerial usefulness, or generally to the propagation of genuine Christianity. In some respects, perhaps, my notions on these subjects were too contracted : but I rejoice, and am thankful, that I have hitherto performed this vow.” The memoir from which this is extracted, was written in 1812.

specting the most important and controverted doctrines of the gospel. Though I held this but a short time, (for when my engagements multiplied I dropped it,) yet I found it very useful in bringing me acquainted with many passages of the word of God, to which I had not hitherto much attended; and it prepared the way for writing my sermons, on doctrinal subjects, with the scriptural testimonies concerning the point in hand in one view before me.

In January 1777, I met with a very high commendation of Mr. Hooker's writings, in which the honourable appellation of *judicious* was bestowed upon him. This excited my curiosity to read his works, which accordingly I did with great profit. In his Discourse of Justification, (§. 7.) I met with the following remarkable passage, which, as well for its excellency as for the effect it had upon my religious views, I shall, though rather long, transcribe: ' If our hands did
' never offer violence to our brethren, a
' bloody thought doth prove us murderers
' before him [God]. If we had never
' opened our mouth to utter any scandalous,
' offensive, or hurtful word, the cry of our
' secret cogitations is heard in the ears of

‘ God. If we did not commit the sins
‘ which daily and hourly in deed, word, or
‘ thoughts, we do commit ; yet, in the good
‘ things which we do, how many defects are
‘ there intermingled ! God, in that which
‘ is done, respecteth the mind and intention
‘ of the doer. Cut off then all those things
‘ wherein we have regarded our own glory ;
‘ those things which men do to please men,
‘ and to satisfy our own liking ; those
‘ things which we do for any by-respect,
‘ not sincerely and purely for the love of
‘ God : and a small score will serve for the
‘ number of our righteous deeds. Let the
‘ holiest and best things we do be con-
‘ sidered :—we are never better affected unto
‘ God than when we pray ;—yet, when we
‘ pray, how are our affections many times dis-
‘ tracted ! how little reverence do we shew
‘ unto the grand Majesty of God unto whom
‘ we speak ! how little remorse of our own
‘ miseries ! how little taste of the sweet in-
‘ fluence of his tender mercies do we feel !
‘ Are we not as unwilling many time to
‘ begin, and as glad to make an end, as if
‘ in saying, *Call upon me*, he had set us a
‘ very burdensome task ? It may seem
‘ somewhat extreme which I will speak ;

‘ therefore let every one judge of it even as
‘ his own heart shall tell him, and no other-
‘ wise. I will but only make a demand :
‘ If God should yield unto us, not, as unto
‘ Abraham, if fifty, forty, thirty, twenty,
‘ yea, or if ten, good persons could be found
‘ in a city, for their sakes the city should
‘ not be destroyed ; but and if he should
‘ make us an offer thus large : Search all
‘ the generations of men since the fall of
‘ our father Adam ; find one man that hath
‘ done one action which hath passed from
‘ him pure, without any stain or blemish at
‘ all ; and, for that man’s only action, nei-
‘ ther men nor angels shall feel the torments
‘ which are prepared for both : do you
‘ think that this ransom, to deliver men and
‘ angels, could be found to be among the
‘ sons of men ? The best things which we
‘ do have somewhat in them to be par-
‘ doned ; how then can we do any thing
‘ meritorious, or worthy to be rewarded ?
‘ Indeed God doth liberally promise what-
‘ soever appertaineth to a blessed life to as
‘ many as sincerely keep his law, though
‘ they be not exactly able to keep it.
‘ Wherefore we acknowledge a dutiful ne-
‘ cessity of doing well, but the meritorious

‘ dignity of doing well we utterly renounce.
‘ We see how far we are from the perfect
‘ righteousness of the law : the little fruit
‘ which we have in holiness, it is, God
‘ knoweth, corrupt and unsound ; we put
‘ no confidence at all in it ; we challenge
‘ nothing in the world for it ; we dare not
‘ call God to reckoning, as if we had him
‘ in our debt books. Our continual suit
‘ to him is, and must be, to bear with our
‘ infirmities, and pardon our offences.’

I had no sooner read this passage than I acquired such an insight into the strictness and spirituality of the divine law, and the perfection which a just and holy God, according to that law, cannot but require in all the services of his reasonable creatures ; that I clearly perceived my very best duties, on which my main dependence had hitherto been placed, to be mere specious sins ; and my whole life appeared to be one continued series of transgression. I now understood the apostle’s meaning when he affirms, that “ by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in the sight of God.” All my difficulties in this matter vanished ; all my distinctions, and reasonings, about the meaning of the words *law* and *justification*,

with all my borrowed criticisms upon them, failed me at once. I could no longer be thus amused ; for I was convinced, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that all men were so notoriously transgressors of every law of God, that no one could possibly be justified in his sight by his obedience to any of the divine commandments. I was sensible that, if God should call me into judgment before him, according to the strictness of his perfect law, for the best duty I ever performed, and for nothing else, I must be condemned as a transgressor ; for when weighed in these exact balances it would be “ found wanting.” Thus I was effectually convinced that if ever I were saved it must be in some way of unmerited mercy and grace, though I did not clearly understand in what way till long after. Immediately therefore I took for my text Gal. iii. 22 : “ But the scripture hath concluded all “ under sin, that the promise, by faith of “ Jesus Christ, might be given to them “ that believe,” and preached from it according to Hooker’s doctrine ; expressing as strongly as I could the defilements of our best actions, and our need of mercy in every thing we do ; in order the more evi-

dently to shew that “salvation is of grace,
 “through faith ; not of works, lest any
 “man should boast.”¹

I had not, however, as yet attained to a knowledge of the foulness of that fountain, whence all these polluted streams flow forth so plentifully into our lives and conversation. Neither was I then able to receive the following nervous passage concerning justification : (§ 6.) ‘The righteousness
 ‘wherein we must be found, if we will be
 ‘justified, is not our own ; therefore we
 ‘cannot be justified by any inherent quality.
 ‘Christ hath merited righteousness for as
 ‘many as are found in him. In him God
 ‘findeth us if we be faithful : for by faith
 ‘we are incorporated into Christ. Then,
 ‘although in ourselves we be altogether

¹ Alluding to this discourse, Mr. S. observed in a sermon preached at Aston, June 25, 1818, before several of his brethren in the ministry : “It is above forty years since God of his
 “mercy brought down my stubborn heart to true repentance.
 “One of the earliest sermons I preached afterwards was from
 “Galat. iii. 22, *But the Scripture hath concluded, &c.* This
 “very discourse was the means of bringing some of my people
 “to feel their danger, and to come to me saying, *What must I*
 “*do to be saved ?* when I hardly knew how to answer the
 “question. Begin, my brethren, and continue in the same
 “way. Shew the people that they are *concluded under sin.*
 “Tell them plainly of their lost condition. Till they feel
 “this, nothing is done. Then exhibit to them *the promise*
 “*by faith of Jesus Christ : this will heal the broken heart.*”

‘ sinful and unrighteous, yet even the man
‘ which is impious in himself, full of ini-
‘ quity, full of sin, him, being found in
‘ Christ through faith, and having his sin
‘ remitted through repentance, him God
‘ beholdeth with a gracious eye ; putteth
‘ away his sin by not imputing it ; taketh
‘ quite away the punishment due thereunto
‘ by pardoning it ; and accepteth him in
‘ Jesus Christ as perfectly righteous as if he
‘ had fulfilled all that was commanded him
‘ in the law. Shall I say, *more* perfectly
‘ righteous than if himself had fulfilled the
‘ whole law ? I must take heed what I
‘ say ; but the apostle saith, *God made Him*
‘ *to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we*
‘ *might be made the righteousness of God in*
‘ *Him.* Such we are in the sight of God
‘ the Father as is the very Son of God him-
‘ self. Let it be counted folly, or frenzy,
‘ or fury, whatsoever, it is our comfort and
‘ our wisdom ; we care for no knowledge in
‘ the world but this, that man hath sinned,
‘ and God hath suffered ; that God hath
‘ made himself the Son of Man, and that
‘ men are made the righteousness of God.¹”

¹ A short paragraph is here omitted, in which the author, as many others have done, quotes Hooker as saying, “ As for
“ such as hold with the church of Rome, that we cannot be

“ saved by Christ alone without works, they do, not only by “ a circle of consequence, but directly, deny the foundation “ of faith ; they hold it not, no not so much as by a thread.” This quotation is from Hooker’s Discourse of Justification, § 19 ; but to any one who will take the pains to examine that discourse, with a view to this particular point, it will be evident that the words are not intended to convey Hooker’s *own* sentiment.

In the first place, they do not contain his doctrine. He is maintaining the possible salvation of numbers of “ our fathers “ infected with popish errors and superstitions :” (§ 10, &c.) which he does especially upon the principle, “ that heresy is “ *heretically maintained* (only) by such as obstinately hold it, “ after wholesome admonition :” whereas “ many there were “ amongst our fathers, who, being seduced by the common “ error of the church of Rome, never knew the meaning of her “ heresies.” (§ 11 and 20.) Thus, having, in sections 20 and 21, pointed out “ many ways” in which, even “ if this proposi- “ tion,” quoted above from section 19, “ were true,” we might yet “ hope that thousands of our fathers which lived in “ popish superstition might be saved ;” he comes, in section 22, to put the question, “ But what if it be *not* true ? What if “ neither that of the Galatians, concerning circumcision, not “ this of the church of Rome, by works, be any *direct* denial “ of the foundation, as it is *affirmed* that both are ?” In short it was the doctrine of his opponents, that the church of Rome denied the foundation of faith “ directly ;” while he maintained that she denied it only “ by a circle of consequence.”—This is made still more evident by his proceeding, in answer to the question which he has just proposed, to inquire, first, (§ 23.) “ What the foundation of faith is ?” and then, (§ 24, 25,) “ What is directly to overthrow it ?” in answer to which last inquiry he comes to the conclusion, that “ all infidels deny “ the foundation of faith *directly : by consequent*, many a “ Christian man, yea, whole Christian churches denied it, and “ do deny it at this present day.”—Accordingly, in the second place, if we recur to section 19, we shall find that the whole of that section, beginning “ But we wash a wall of loam,” is no other than Hooker’s statement of the objections of his opponents—those “ zealous,” or as perhaps we might call them, *ultra*-protestants, by whom, as is observed in the next paragraph but one of the Force of Truth, Hooker was “ put “ upon his defence” for making “ unwarrantable concessions”

to the church of Rome. And hence the very next words to those which have given occasion to this note, are (at the opening of § 20,) “ This, to my remembrance, being *all that hath been opposed* with any countenance or shew of reason, “ I hope, *if this be answered*, the cause in question is at “ an end.” And the reader of Hooker’s discourse will find that he frequently thus introduces the objections of his opponents in order to answer them, in a manner that might lead, on the first view, to the supposition that he was proposing his own sentiments.

But let it not be imagined that the mistake into which the author has fallen, in this particular, at all affects the question of Hooker’s doctrine concerning justification : it regards merely the point of the church of Rome’s denying the foundation of faith “ directly,” or denying it only “ by consequence.”

He afterwards (§ 31.) thus defends his doctrine against the objections of the Papists : (for at that time none but the Papists openly objected to it :) ‘ It is a childish cavil
 ‘ wherewith, in the matter of justification,
 ‘ our adversaries do so greatly please themselves, exclaiming that we tread all Christian virtues under our feet, and require
 ‘ nothing in Christians but faith ; because
 ‘ we teach that faith alone justifieth.
 ‘ Whereas by this speech we never meant
 ‘ to exclude either hope or charity from
 ‘ being always joined as inseparable mates
 ‘ with faith in the man that is justified ; or
 ‘ works from being added as necessary duties
 ‘ required at the hands of every justified
 ‘ man : but to shew that faith is the only
 ‘ hand which putteth on Christ unto justifi-

‘ fication ; and Christ the only garment
‘ which, being so put on, covereth the shame
‘ of our defiled natures, hideth the imper-
‘ fections of our works, preserveth us blame-
‘ less in the sight of God ; before whom,
‘ otherwise, the weakness of our faith were
‘ cause sufficient to make us culpable ; yea to
‘ shut us from the kingdom of Heaven, where
‘ nothing that is not absolute can enter.’

Had I at this time met with such passages in the writings of the dissenters, or in any of those modern publications, which, under the brand of *methodistical*, are condemned without reading, or perused with invincible prejudice, I should not have thought them worth regard ; but should have rejected them as wild enthusiasm. But I knew that Hooker was deemed perfectly orthodox, and a standard writer, by the prelates of the church in his own days. I learned from his dispute with Mr. Travers, that he was put upon his defence for making concessions in this matter to the church of Rome, which the zealous Protestants did not think warrantable ; and that he was judged by the more rigid too lax in his doctrine, by none too rigid. I had never heard it insinuated that he was tinctured with enthusiasm ; and

the solidity of his judgement, and the acuteness of his reasoning faculties, need no voucher to the attentive reader. His opinion therefore carried great weight with it ; made me suspect the truth of my former sentiments ; and put me upon serious inquiries and deep meditation on this subject, accompanied with earnest prayers for the teaching and direction of the Lord in this important point. The result was, that, after many objections and doubts, and much examination of the word of God, in a few months I began to accede to Hooker's sentiments : and at the present my opinion in this respect, as far as I know, coincides with these passages of this eminent author, and is supported and vindicated by the same arguments. He therefore, who would prove our doctrine of *justification by faith alone* to be an error, will do well to answer in the first place these quotations from Hooker.

Indeed as far as I can understand him, there is scarcely any doctrine which, with no inconsiderable offence, I now preach, that is not as evidently contained in his writings as in my sermons. Witness particularly his Sermon of the Certainty and Perpetuity of Faith in the Elect ; in which

the doctrine of the final perseverance of true believers is expressly taught, and scripturally maintained : and he closes it with this noble triumph of full assurance, as resulting from that comfortable doctrine in the hearts of confirmed and experienced Christians : ‘ *I know in whom I have believed* : I am not ignorant whose precious blood hath been shed for me : I have a Shepherd full of kindness, full of care, and full of power : unto Him I commit myself. His own finger hath engraven this sentence in the tables of my heart : *Satan hath desired to winnow thee as wheat, but I have prayed that thy faith fail not.* Therefore the assurance of my hope I will labour to keep as a jewel unto the end ; and by labour, through the gracious mediation of his prayer, I shall keep it.’ With such words in my mouth, and such assurance in my heart, I wish to live, and hope to die.

The insertion of these quotations from this old author will, I hope, need no apology. Many have not his works, and these extracts are worthy of their perusal : others from these specimens may be prevailed with to read what perhaps has hitherto been an

unnoticed book in their studies. Especially I recommend to those who admire him as the champion of the external order and discipline of the church, and who willingly allow him the honour of being distinguished by the epithet *judicious*, that they should attentively read, and impartially consider his doctrine. This would put an effectual stop to those declamations, that, either ignorantly or maliciously, are made against the very doctrines as novel inventions, which have just now been explained and defended in Hooker's own words. For my part, though I acknowledge that he advances many things which I should be unwilling to subscribe, yet I heartily bless God that at this time I read him: the first material alteration that took place in my views of the gospel being in consequence of it.

One more quotation I shall make, and so take my leave of him. Addressing himself, in his second Sermon on part of St. Jude's Epistle, to the pastors who are appointed to feed the chosen in Israel, he says: (§ 32, 33.)
' If there be any feeling of Christ, any drop
' of heavenly dew, or any spark of God's
' good Spirit within you, stir it up; be
' careful to build and edify first yourselves

‘ and then your flocks in this most holy
‘ faith. I say, *first yourselves* ; for he which
‘ will set the hearts of other men on fire with
‘ the love of Christ, must himself burn with
‘ love. It is want of faith in ourselves,
‘ my brethren, which makes us retchless
‘ [careless] in building others. We forsake
‘ the Lord’s inheritance and feed it not.
‘ What is the reason of this ? Our own de-
‘ sires are settled where they should not be.
‘ We ourselves are like those women which
‘ have a longing to eat coals, and lime, and
‘ filth : we are fed, some with honour, some
‘ with ease, some with wealth : the gospel
‘ waxeth loathesome and unpleasant in our
‘ taste ; how should we then have a care
‘ to feed others with that which we cannot
‘ fancy ourselves ? If faith wax cold and
‘ slender in the heart of the prophet, it will
‘ soon perish from the ears of the people.’—
It is not needful to add any reflections upon
this passage ; every one will readily make
them for himself : we are however re-
minded of Solomon’s words, “ There is no
“ new thing under the sun : is there any
“ thing whereof it may be said, See this
“ is new ? It hath been already of old
“ time which was before us.” “ That

“ which hath been is now, and that which
“ is to be hath already been.” Eccles. i.
9, 10, iii. 15.)

To my shame be it spoken, though I had twice subscribed the Articles, which allow the book of Homilies to be sound and wholesome doctrine, I had never yet seen that book, and understood not what its doctrine was. But now being engaged in a serious inquiry after truth, and Hooker's works having given me a more favourable opinion of these old authors, I was inclined to examine them ; and I read part of the book with some degree of attention. And, though many things seemed “hard sayings” that I could not receive, yet others were made very useful to me, especially concerning justification. In short, I perceived that the very doctrine, which I had hitherto despised as novel and methodistical, was indisputably the standard doctrine of the established church, when the Homilies were composed : and consequently that it is so still ; for they have lost none of their authority (however fallen into disrepute,) with those who subscribe the thirty-nine articles. This weakened my prejudice though it did not prove the doctrine true.

About this time a new and unexpected effect was produced by my preaching.—I had hitherto been satisfied to see people regularly frequent the church, listen attentively to what was discoursed, and lead decent moral lives. The way in which I had been led was so smooth, and the progress I had made so gradual ; I had lately experienced so little *distressing* concern for my own soul, and had so little acquaintance with persons conversant in these matters ; that, while I declared the strictness, spirituality, and sanction of the law of God in an alarming manner, it never occurred to me, that my hearers might not proceed in the same easy gradual way. But I had scarcely begun this new method of preaching, when application was made to me by persons in great distress about their souls ; for, their consciences being awakened to a sense of their lost condition by nature and practice, they were anxious in inquiring what they must do to be saved. I knew not well what to say to them, my views being greatly clouded, and my sentiments concerning justification very much perplexed : but, being willing to give them the best counsel I could, I exhorted them in a

general way to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ ; though I was incapable of instructing them either concerning the true nature of faith, or in what manner they were to seek it. However I better understood my own meaning when I advised them to the study of the scriptures, accompanied with prayer to God to be enabled rightly to understand them ; and when I inculcated amendment of life. In this manner the Lord slowly brought them forwards ; and though, for want of a better instructor, they were a considerable time before they arrived at establishment in the faith, yet some of them, having their minds less leavened with prejudice and the pride of reasoning, were more apt scholars in the school of Christ than I was, and got the start of me in the knowledge both of doctrine and duty ; and in their turns became, without intending it, in some respects monitors to me, and I derived important advantage from them.

This singular circumstance, of being an instrument of bringing others earnestly and successfully to inquire after salvation, while I so little understood the true gospel of Jesus Christ, very much increased my perplexity. I became doubly earnest to know

the truth, lest I should mislead those who confided their precious souls to me as their spiritual instructor. This added to my diligence in reading and meditating on the word of God ; and made me more fervent in prayer to be guided to the knowledge of the truth. And, under every difficulty, I constantly had recourse unto the Lord, to preserve me from ignorance and error, and to enable me to distinguish between the doctrines of his word, and the inventions and traditions of men.

About this time I established a weekly lecture, for expounding the scriptures, in my other parish ; by which I obtained further acquaintance with the various parts of the word of God. It was my general practice, in penning these lectures, to search out all the texts referred to in the margin of the Bible, with such as I could recollect upon the subject, and to make use of them in explaining each other. This method enabled me to store my memory with the language of scripture, and made way for a greater exactness in discussing doctrinal subjects, than I had hitherto been acquainted with. In the course of the winter¹ 1777, I was

¹ That is, in the *early* part of the year.—J. S.

engaged in deep meditation on Luke xi. 9—13, concerning the Holy Spirit being given in answer to prayer. And at length, having made a collection of all the scriptures I could meet with which related to that important doctrine, diligently comparing them together, and meditating upon them, and earnestly beseeching the Lord to fulfil the promise to my soul, I wrote two sermons upon the subject ; one from Luke xi. 13 ; “ If ye then being evil know how to give
“ good gifts unto your children, how much
“ more shall your heavenly Father give the
“ Holy Spirit to them that ask Him :” the other from James i. 16, 17 ; “ Do not err,
“ my beloved brethren : every good gift,
“ and every perfect gift is from above, and
“ cometh down from the Father of lights.” By this my views of a Christian’s privileges and duties in this respect were much enlarged, and my requests made known unto the Lord in a more full, exact, and believing manner than before. Though I still remained very ignorant in many important matters respecting the person, offices, and work of the Holy Spirit ; yet I had discovered more of what was promised concerning him, and therefore knew better what to ask.

My obligations to Bishop Beveridge must here be acknowledged.—When I first began to peruse his sermons, I conceived a mean opinion of him ; and it was some time before I could prevail with myself to examine any further into his writings : but, being now more advanced in my inquiry after truth, those singularities which at first offended me became intolerable, and I began to relish the simplicity, spirituality, love of Christ, and affection for souls, which eminently shine forth in many parts of his works. Indeed I received considerable instruction from him ; but especially his sermon on the real satisfaction made by the death of Christ for the sins of believers was the blessed means of clearing up my views, and confirming my faith, respecting that fundamental doctrine of Christianity. On Good Friday, 1777, I preached a sermon upon that subject, from Isaiah liii. 6 : “ All
“ we like sheep have gone astray ; we have
“ turned every one to his own way, and the
“ Lord hath laid [caused to meet] on Him
“ the iniquities of us all.” I endeavoured to prove (what has ever since been the foundation of all my hopes,) that Christ indeed bare the sins of all who should ever

truly believe, in all their guilt, condemnation, and deserved punishment, “in his own body on the tree.” I explicitly avowed my belief that Christ, as our surety and bondsman, stood in our law-place, to answer all our obligations, and to satisfy divine justice and the demands of the law for our offences : and I publicly renounced, as erroneous and grievous perversions of scripture, all my former explanations and interpretations of these subjects.

This was the first doctrine in which I was brought clearly and fully to acknowledge the truth ; though I had with no little earnestness for two years been inquiring about it : to so astonishing a degree was my blinded understanding filled with prejudice against the doctrines of the word of God ! Hitherto they had been “foolishness” to me ; but now under the divine teaching I began, though very dimly, to discern the wisdom of God in them.

I say *dimly* ; for I was still under many and great mistakes, and very ignorant in many important points. I knew sin to be the transgression of the divine law ; but I did not perceive its odious deformity, as deliberate rebellion against God’s sovereign

authority, and an express contradiction to His holy nature ; as charging God foolishly, with the want of either wisdom or goodness, in laying such restraints upon the inclinations of his creatures ; and as tending to overturn all subordination in the universe, and to introduce anarchy, confusion, and misery into the whole creation. I had discovered that my best actions were defiled ; but I understood not that this was the effect of a depraved nature, and a polluted heart. The doctrine of original sin, as the fruitful root of these multiplied evils, was as yet no part of my creed. Inconsistently, I was an Arian, or a *Clarkist*, in my sentiments concerning the person of Christ, and the divinity of the Holy Ghost. Some faint conception I had formed of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the soul ; the beginnings of it I little understood ; and I continued to entertain an implacable enmity to the doctrine of election, and the truths more intimately connected with it. But my faith was now fixed upon a crucified Saviour, (though I dishonoured his person, and denied his Deity,) and I had a sincere desire of being devoted to the Lord. He therefore in mercy accepted his own work

in my heart, and pardoned all that was mine ; and at length extricated me from that labyrinth of perplexities and inconsistencies in which I was entangled.

About this time, in the course of my lectures, our Lord's discourse with Nicodemus came again under my consideration. Notwithstanding much meditation and many prayers, I could not satisfy my mind about it. Some internal change, I was convinced, must be implied in the expression " born " again," and " born of the Spirit ;" and, according to what I had experienced, I endeavoured to explain it ; but I was still very confused in my views of that important subject, and had many doubts whether I were right or wrong in what I advanced. Hitherto, excepting Leland on the Deistical Writers, I had not read any book written by a dissenter, with the least degree of candour and attention ; but at this crisis I met with the first volume of Dr. Evans's sermons, entitled ' The Christian Temper.' I was induced to read it by the recommendation of a friend ; but, such was my proud foolish heart, I opened it with great prejudice because I understood that the author was a dissenter ! However, this book came

with a blessing : for by perusing it I at length perceived that fallen man, both body and soul, is indeed “ carnal, and sold under “ sin ;” that by nature in every man living the reasonable and immortal part is destitute of *spirituality*, immersed in matter, and, by a dishonourable and miserable prostitution, given up “ to make provision for the flesh “ to fulfil the lusts thereof ;” and that man must be renewed in the spirit of his mind, new “ created unto good works,” “ born “ of the Spirit” of God, made “ partaker “ of a” new and “ divine nature,” before he can possibly be made meet for, or admitted into, the kingdom of God. In a very little time all my difficulties about this matter vanished, and the truth became so exceedingly plain and evident, that, until I had made the experiment, I could scarcely be persuaded but that every person who heard it rightly explained must assent to it. This doctrine I have ever since invariably preached, with good effect, I trust, in “ opening the eyes of sinners, and turning “ them from darkness to light, and from the “ power of Satan unto God.” Acts xxvi. 28.

When I had made this little progress in seeking the truth, my acquaintance with

Mr. Newton was resumed. From the conclusion of our correspondence in December 1775, till April 1777, it had been almost wholly dropped. To speak plainly, I did not care for his company : I did not mean to make any use of him as an instructor ; and I was unwilling the world should think us in any way connected. But, on a particular occasion, under discouraging circumstances, I at this time called upon him : and his discourse so comforted and edified me, that my heart, being by his means, relieved from its burden, became susceptible of affection for him. From that time I was inwardly pleased to have him for my friend ; though not as now rejoiced to *call* him so. I had, however, even at that time, no thoughts of learning doctrinal truth from him, and was ashamed to be detected in his company : but I sometimes stole away to spend an hour with him. About the same period I once heard him preach ; but still it was “ foolishness to me,” his sermon being principally upon the believer’s experience, in some particulars with which I was unacquainted : so that, though I now loved and valued him, I considered him as a person misled by enthusiastical

notions ; and strenuously insisted that we should never think alike, till we meet in heaven.

All along, in the progress of this inquiry, I grew more and more concerned about my character. I saw myself continually verging nearer and nearer to that scheme of doctrine which the world calls *methodism* ; nor could I help it without doing violence to my convictions. I had indeed set out with the *avowed*, and I trust, *sincere*, resolution of seeking the truth as impartially as possible ; and of embracing it wherever I might find it, without respect to interest, reputation, or any worldly consideration whatever. I had taken patiently, and sustained comfortably, the loss of my opening prospect of preferment ; I trust chiefly from the supports of grace, and the consciousness of having acted with integrity : yet I am not sure that my deceitful heart might not also derive some support from a vain imagination that my character would be no loser. Ambitious thirst after the praise of men was much more my peculiar corruption than covetousness ; and I had been in no ordinary degree proud of my natural understanding. I had been accustomed to hear

the people called methodists mentioned with contempt, as ignorant and deluded, as fools, and sometimes as madmen ; and that with no small degree of complacency and self-preference, I too had despised them as weak enthusiasts : but I now began to be apprehensive that the tables were about to be turned upon me. If I professed and taught these doctrines, I must no longer be considered as a man of sober understanding ; but as one of those persons, whose heads, being naturally weak, had been turned by religious studies ; and who, having fallen under the power of enthusiasm, had become no better than fools and madmen.

This was the sharpest trial I had to pass through ; for I had not yet learned, that “ when we are reproached for the name of Christ happy are we.” Nor did I remember, with due consideration of the reasons assignable for so extraordinary a circumstance, that the apostles were “ fools for Christ’s sake ;” were deemed “ beside themselves :” and went “ through evil report and good report, as deceivers, and yet true :” that they were “ every where spoken against,” as “ the men that turned the world upside down ;” were treated as

“vain babblers,” and “accounted the filth
“of the world, and the offscouring of all
“things.” I did not consider that Jesus
himself, the “brightness of the Father’s
“glory,” the “Word and Wisdom of God,”
who “went about doing good,” and “spake
“as never man spake,” was not only
“rejected,” but “despised” as not worth
hearing, as “one that had a devil,” as in
league with the devil, as a “blasphemer,”
“a Samaritan,” “a madman,” yea “a
“devil.” I read indeed, but my under-
standing was not yet opened to understand
such plain scriptures as these : “If ye were
“of the world, the world would love his
“his own ; but because ye are not of the
“world, but I have chosen you out of the
“world, therefore the world hateth you.
“Remember the word that I said unto you :
“The servant is not greater than his Lord ;
“if they have persecuted me, they will also
“persecute you.” (John xv. 19, 20.)
“The disciple is not above his master, nor
“the servant above his Lord. If they have
“called the master of the house Beelzebub,
“how much more shall they call them of
“the household ?” (Matt. x. 24, 25.)
“Blessed are ye when men shall revile you,

“ and persecute you, and say all manner of
“ evil against you *falsely* for my sake. Re-
“ joice and be exceeding glad, for great is
“ your reward in heaven ; for so persecuted
“ they the prophets which were before you,”
(Matt. v. 11, 12.) Not being aware of
these consequences when my resolution was
first formed, I was as one who has begun to
build without counting the cost ; and was
greatly disturbed when I saw the favourite
idol of my proud heart, my character, in
such imminent danger.

It must be supposed that this apprehen-
sion would make me cautious what doctrines
I admitted into my creed ; and unwilling to
be convinced that those things were true
and important, the profession of which was
sure to bring infamy on my character ; and
that, even after the fullest conviction, I
should thus be rendered very careful in
what manner I preached them. In general,
however, though the conflict was sharp, I
was enabled to be faithful. The words,
“ Necessity is laid upon me ; yea, wo is me
if I preach not the gospel,” were commonly
upon my mind when I penned my sermons,
and when I entered the pulpit ; and though,
when a bold declaration of what I believed

to be the truth, with an offensive application of it to the consciences of my hearers, drew opposition and calumny upon me, I have secretly resolved to be more circumspect the next time ; yet, when that time came, my heart and conscience being both engaged, I dared not conceal one tittle of what appeared to me to be true, and to promise usefulness. But while, with perturbation of mind, and with many disquieting apprehensions, I declared the message with which I supposed myself to be entrusted ; to screen myself from the charge of methodism, and to soften the offence, I was frequently throwing out slighting expressions, and bringing the charge of enthusiasm, against those who preached such doctrines as I was not yet convinced of. On the other hand, my concern about my character quickened me very much in prayer, and increased my diligence in searching the scriptures, that I might be sure I was not, at this expence, preaching “ cunningly devised fables,” instead of feeding the souls committed to my care with the unadulterated milk of evangelical truth.

A striking letter on the subject here treated of, and written just at this time, (April 15, 1777,) is inserted in Mr. S.’s life, page 117. He says, “ It is an uncommon degree of fortitude “ to be able to set one’s face against the world, and to act con-

“ trary to its received maxims and customs. The soldier,
“ who is bold as a lion in the day of battle, turns coward here,
“ and dares not refuse a challenge, though his reason, his re-
“ ligion, the laws of the land, and his own inclination, are all
“ directly contrary to it ; though his life and soul are at stake.
“ Such a tyrant is custom ! Who dare oppose him ? I will
“ tell you who : the confirmed Christian. *Who is he that over-*
“ *cometh the world, &c.* But it is not every Christian, no
“ nor every good and pious Christian, who can thus courageously
“ act, and undauntedly follow the dictates of conscience, when
“ friends, relations, and all those whom one has been accus-
“ tomed to reverence and love are of a contrary opinion.
“ This is the last victory the Christian gains. . . . Here I find
“ my own deficiency, as much or more than in any other
“ respect. Conformity to others in things unchristian,
“ the fear of men, a servile spirit of time-serving, &c. are
“ the faults of ministers, and effectually hinder even those
“ who desire it from performing the most important parts
“ of their ministry, both in public preaching and in private ap-
“ plication. But this kind of spirit goes not out by a very
“ spiritual and devout course of life. Indeed its expulsion is
“ the gift of God, and is to be especially sought for from him.

In this state of mind, which is more easily understood by experience than description, I met with Mr. Venn's Essay on the Prophecy of Zacharias. (Luke i. 67—79.) I was no stranger to the character he bore in the eyes of the world, and did not begin to read this book with great alacrity or expectation : however, the interesting subject treated of engaged my attention, and I read it with great seriousness, and some degree of impartiality. I disapproved indeed of many things ; but the truth and importance of others brought conviction to both my

understanding and conscience. Especially I found a word in season respecting my foolish and wicked shame, and attention to character in inquiring after divine truth, and in the performance of the important duties of a gospel minister. These solemn words in particular (page 85,) came home to my heart : ‘ If the spirit of the world, ‘ pride, carelessness respecting the soul, and ‘ neglect of Christ, be not hateful to God ‘ and destructive to men, the gospel (with ‘ reverence I speak it,) is an imposition. ‘ Do you abhor that thought as blasphemy ? ‘ Abhor as much a fawning upon Christ ‘ from year to year in your closet, calling ‘ him there your Lord and your God, and ‘ then coming out to consult the world how ‘ far they will allow you to obey his plain ‘ commands, without saying you are a ‘ methodist. Cease rather to profess any ‘ allegiance to Christ, than treat him, under ‘ professions of duty, with such contempt. ‘ “ I would,” saith he to the church of ‘ Laodicea, “ thou wert cold or hot ; so ‘ then because thou art lukewarm, and ‘ neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out ‘ of my mouth.” ’

I should as easily be convinced that there

is no Holy Ghost, as that he was not present with my soul when I read this passage, and the whole of what Mr. Venn has written upon the subject. It came to my heart with such evidence, conviction, and demonstration, that it lifted me up above the world, and produced that victory which faith alone can give, and that “liberty” which uniformly attends the presence of the Spirit of the Lord. I became at once ashamed of my base ingratitude and foolish fears ; and was filled with such consolation and rejoicing, even in the prospect of sacrificing my character, and running the risk of infamy and contempt, as made me entirely satisfied on that head ; and, some few seasons of unbelief excepted, I have never since been much troubled about being called an enthusiast or a methodist.

But, while I was thus delivered from the dread of unmerited reproaches, I continued as much as ever afraid of *real* enthusiasm : nay, I became continually more and more averse to every thing which can justly bear that name : so that, the nearer I verged to what I had ignorantly supposed to be enthusiastical, the more apprehensive I was lest my earnestness in such interesting inquiries, and the warmth of my natural spirit

thus occasionally increased, should put me off my guard, and betray me into delusions and mistakes. From this danger I could however obtain no security but by keeping close to the study of the word of God ; and by being earnest and particular in praying to be preserved from error, and to be enabled to distinguish between the pure revelations of the Holy Spirit contained in scripture, and the inventions of men, the imaginations of my own heart, or the delusions of the spirit of lies.

The doctrine of a Trinity of coequal persons in the Unity of the Godhead had been hitherto no part of my creed. I had long been accustomed to despise this “ great “ mystery of godliness.” I had first quarrelled with the articles of the established church about this doctrine ; I had been very decided and open in my declarations against it ; and my unhumbléd reason still retained many objections to it. But, about June 1777, I began to be troubled with doubts about my own sentiments, and to suspect the truth of Dr. Clarke’s hypothesis. I had just read Mr. Lindsey’s Apology and Sequel. Before I saw these tracts, I had even ridiculed those who thought of con-

futing him on the *orthodox* scheme, and was not without thoughts of maintaining Dr. Clarke's system against Mr. L. But, when I understood that he claimed Dr. Clarke as a Socinian, I was extremely surprised, and, in consequence, was led again to a more serious and anxious consideration of the subject. The more I studied the more I was dissatisfied. Many things now first occurred to me as strong objections against my own sentiments ; and, being thus perplexed, and unable to form a scheme for myself, I easily perceived that I was not qualified to dispute with another person. My pride and my convictions struggled hard for the victory : I was very unwilling to become a Trinitarian in the strict sense of the word, though in my own sense I had for some time pretended to be one ; and yet the more I considered it the more I was dissatisfied with all other systems. My esteem for Mr. Newton was also now very much increased ; and, though I had hitherto concealed this part of my sentiments from him, yet I knew his to be very different. I was not indeed willing to be taught by him in other matters, yet in this respect, finding his opinion the same which in all former ages

of the church hath been accounted orthodox, while that which I held had always been branded as heretical ; my fears of a mistake were thus exceedingly increased. In this perplexity I applied to the Lord, and frequently besought him to lead me to a settled conclusion what was the truth on this important subject. After much intense meditation, together with a careful examination of all the scriptures which I then understood to relate to it, accompanied with earnest prayer for divine teaching, I was at length constrained to renounce, as utterly indefensible, all my former sentiments, and to accede to that doctrine which I had so long despised. I saw, and I could no longer help seeing, that the offices and works, attributed in the scripture to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, are such as none but the infinite God could perform : that it is a contradiction to believe the *real*, and consequently *infinite*, satisfaction to divine justice made by the death of Christ, without believing him to be ‘ very God of very God :’ nor could the Holy Ghost give spiritual life, and dwell in the hearts of all true believers at the same time, to adapt his work of convincing, enlightening, teaching, strength-

ening, sanctifying, and comforting, to the several cases of every individual, were he not the omniscient, omnipresent, infinite God. Being likewise certain, from reason as well as from scripture, that there are not, and cannot be more Gods than one ; I was driven from my reasonings, and constrained to submit my understanding to divine revelation ; and, allowing that the incomprehensible God alone can fully know the unsearchable mysteries of his own divine nature, and the manner of his own existence, to adopt the doctrine of a ‘ Trinity in ‘ Unity,’ among other reasons of still greater moment, in order to preserve consistency in my own scheme. It was, however, a considerable time before I was disentangled from my embarrassments on this subject.

Hitherto my prejudices against Mr. Hervey, as a writer upon doctrinal subjects, had been very strong. I thought him a very pious man, and I had read with pleasure some part of his Meditations : yet, looking on him as an enthusiast, I had no curiosity to read any other of his writings. But, about July 1777, I providentially met with his Theron and Aspasio ; and, opening the book, I was much pleased with the first

passage on which I cast my eye. This engaged me to read the whole ; which I did with uncommon attention ; nor did I, in twice perusing it, meet with any thing contrary to my own sentiments, without immediately beseeching God to guide me to the truth. I trust he heard and answered these prayers ; for, though I could not but dissent from Mr. H. (as I still do) in some few things, yet I was both instructed and convinced by his arguments and illustrations in every thing relative to our fallen, guilty, lost, and helplessly miserable state by nature ; and the way and manner in which the believer is accounted and accepted as righteous, in the presence of a just, holy, and heart-searching, a faithful and unchangeable God. Especially his animated description and application of the stag-chase cleared up this important matter to my mind, more than any thing I had hitherto met with upon the subject.

The points on which Mr. S. always differed from the author of Theron and Aspasio were principally three : 1. His making faith to include, and very much to consist in, assurance or our own personal acceptance with God—instead of leaving such an assurance gradually to grow up in the mind from its own consciousness of exercising “repentance towards God, “and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ,” and bringing forth “fruits meet for repentance :” 2. His rejecting very much

all appeal to the evidences of a new heart and new life, as the *proof* of our interest in Christ, and acceptance with God—mistaking this for self-righteous confidence, in consequence of his failing to distinguish between the *ground* of our acceptance, and the *proof* that we are accepted : and 3. His making love to God to consist too exclusively in gratitude ; whereas Mr. S. thought it of great consequence to insist on a cordial reconciliation to the divine character and government, and a delight in the holiness and moral perfections of the divine Being. See his Life, pp. 337, 340, 360, 361, 667.

I had now acceded to most of the doctrines which at present I believe and preach ; except the doctrine of personal election, and those tenets which immediately depend upon it, and are connected with it. These were still foolishness to me : and, so late as August 1777, I told my friend Mr. Newton, that I was sure I never should be of his sentiments on that head. To this he answered, that if I never mentioned this subject he never should, as we were now agreed in all he judged absolutely needful ; but that he had not the least doubt of my very shortly becoming a Calvinist, as I should presently discover my system of doctrine to be otherwise incomplete, and inconsistent with itself. Indeed I had by this time so repeatedly discovered myself to be mistaken where I had been very confident, that I began to suspect myself in every thing in which I entertained sentiments different from those with whom

I conversed. This, however, did not influence me to take their opinions upon trust ; but only disposed me more particularly and attentively to consider them ; and in every perplexity to have recourse to the Lord, to be preserved from error, and guided to the truth.

About the same time also I began to have more frequent applications made to me by persons under deep concern for their souls. My heart was much interested in this new employment ; and I was greatly concerned to see their pressing anxieties, and to hear their doubts, difficulties, and objections against themselves. Being sincerely desirous to give them good instruction, and to lead them on to establishment and comfort, I felt my deficiency, and seemed to have no ground to go on, nor any counsel to give them, but what, instead of relieving them, led them into greater perplexity. In this case I earnestly besought the Lord to teach me what word in season to speak to them.

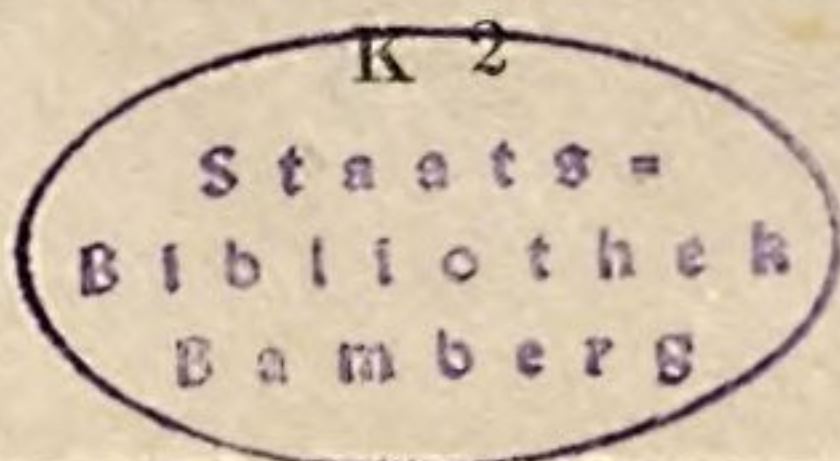
While I was thus circumstanced, I read Witsius's Economy of the Covenants, and observed what use he made of the doctrine of election for this very purpose. This convinced me that the doctrine, if true, would

afford that ground of encouragement which the people wanted. They had been awakened from ignorant formality, open ungodliness and vice, or entire carelessness about religion, to an earnest and anxious inquiry after salvation ; they appeared truly penitent and real believers, and heartily desirous of cleaving unto the Lord ; and they wanted some security that they should not, through the deceitfulness of their own hearts, their weakness, the entanglements of the world, and the temptations of Satan, fall back again into their former course of sin. This, if genuine, was the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit : and, if wrought in consequence of “ the determinate purpose and “ foreknowledge of God ” respecting them, it would follow, from the entire and undeserved freeness of this first gift bestowed on them, when neither desiring nor seeking it, but while in a state of enmity and rebellion against God, and neglect of his service ; and from his unchangeableness in his purposes, and faithfulness to his promises ; that he would assuredly carry on and complete the good work of his grace, and “ keep them by his power,” as in a castle ; “ through faith unto salvation.”

Having now discovered one use of this doctrine, which before I objected to as useless and pernicious, I was led to consider how the other objections, which I had been accustomed to urge against it, might be answered. It is true, I now began to consider it as a mystery, not to be comprehended, nor yet too curiously searched into by man's natural reason ; but humbly received by faith, just as far as it is plainly revealed in God's unerring word. I was therefore constrained to leave many objections unanswered, or to resolve them into the incomprehensible nature of God, whose judgments and counsels are, as the great deep, unfathomable ; and into the sovereignty of God, who "doeth what he will
"with his own," and "giveth no account
"of his matters," let who will presume to find fault ; and into his declarations, that his thoughts and ways are "as far above
"our thoughts and ways as the heavens
"are above the earth." Here I left the matter, conscious, at length, that such knowledge was "too high for me : " and that, if God had said it, it was not my place to cavil against it. I acknowledge that this way of proceeding is not very sa-

tisfactory to man's proud curiosity, who would be "as God" and know all that God knows ; and who even dares to dispute with him : and there are times when I can hardly acquiesce in such a solution. But, surely, it is highly becoming the dependent state and limited understanding of the creature, to submit the decision of all such high points implicitly to the award of the infinitely wise Creator. Indeed the Christian religion expressly requires it of us ; for our Lord declares that "except we "receive the kingdom of God," not as disputing philosophers, but "as a little child, "we shall in no wise enter therein." The day is coming when we shall be able to answer all objections. Here "we walk by "faith," "and see in part, through a glass, "darkly ;" hereafter we shall "see face to "face, and know even as we are known."

The doctrine of personal election to eternal life, when properly stated, lies open to no objection which may not likewise with equal plausibility be urged against the conduct of God, in placing one nation in a more favourable condition than another, especially as to religious advantages ; without the previous good or bad behaviour of either of them, or any *discernible* reason for the preference. In both cases we may say, *Unmerited favour* to one person, or people, is no injustice to others ; and the infinitely wise God hath many reasons for his determinations, which we cannot discern, and which he deigns not to make known to us.



If sinners *deserve* the punishment inflicted on them, it cannot be *unjust* in the great Governor of the world to *pre-determine* their condemnation to it. The contrariety to justice and goodness, if there be any, must certainly be found in the Lord's *actual dealings* with his creatures, and not in his *pre-determination* thus to deal with them. It could not be inconsistent with any of the divine attributes, for the Lord from all eternity to decree to act consistently with all of them. The clamours excited against *predestination*, if carefully scrutinized, are generally found to be against the *thing decreed*, and not against the circumstance of its *having been decreed from eternity*. The sovereignty of God, when duly considered, appears to be nothing more than infinite perfection determining and accomplishing every thing in the very best manner possible; and infallibly performing the counsels of everlasting knowledge and wisdom, justice, truth, and love; notwithstanding all the plans and designs of innumerable voluntary rational agents, which might seem incompatible with them: nay, performing those counsels even by means of these voluntary agents, in perfect consistency with their free agency and accountableness; but in a manner which we are utterly incapable of comprehending.

We should scarcely object to this infinitely wise and holy sovereignty of God, however absolute, did we not, from consciousness of guilt and carnal enmity of heart, suspect that it might probably be found at variance with our happiness: and I apprehend, should any man be fully persuaded that God had decreed his eternal happiness, however groundless that persuasion might be, he would find his aversion to the doctrine of election exceedingly abated by it. I have often observed that some persons, who declaim most vehemently against the Calvinistical doctrine of divine decrees, seem perfectly reconciled to predestination, when persuaded that God hath *eternally decreed the salvation of all men*! On the other hand, no consciously impenitent sinner is cordially reconciled to the general declarations of scripture, concerning the everlasting misery of all impenitent sinners, whatever he may think about personal election.

In fact, the grand difficulty in the whole of the divine conduct equally embarrasses every system of Christianity, and every scheme of Deism; except men deny that God is the Creator and Governor of the world. For wickedness and misery actually exist and abound: the fact is undeniable: the

almighty God could have prevented this ; and we should have thought that infinite love would have preserved the creation from all evils of every description. Yet infinite wisdom saw good to permit them to enter, and amazingly to prevail ! Till this difficulty be completely solved, let none object to truths, plainly revealed in scripture, on account of similar difficulties. But let us remember, that our narrow capacities, and scanty information, do not qualify us to judge concerning what it becomes the infinite God to determine and to do, and let us adopt the language of the apostle on this subject : “ Oh ! the
“ depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of
“ God ! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways
“ past finding out ! For who hath known the mind of the
“ Lord ? or who hath been his counsellor ? Or who hath first
“ given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again ?
“ For *of him*, and *through him*, and *to him* are all things :
“ to whom be glory for ever. Amen !” (*Rom. xi. 33—36.*)

As for the objections made to these doctrines, as inconsistent with free agency, accountableness, commands, invitations, calls to repentance, faith, and holiness, and diligence in the use of means : they *universally* and *altogether* arise from *misrepresentation* and *misapprehension* of the subject. See the Author’s Sermon on Election and Final Perseverance.—
(Fifth Edit.)

Leaving therefore all difficulties of a metaphysical nature to be cleared up in that world of light and knowledge, I began to consider the abuses of this doctrine, which I had always looked upon as a very formidable objection against it. But I soon discovered, that, though ungodly men, who make profession of religion, will turn the
“ grace of God into licentiousness ;” yet we might so explain and guard these doctrines, that none could thus abuse them, without being conscious of it, and so de-

tecting their own hypocrisy. It still indeed appeared probable to me, that the preaching of them might at first occasion some trouble of mind to a few well-disposed persons : but I considered that by a cautious declaration of them, and contrasting them with the general promises of the gospel to all who believe, this might in great measure be prevented : at the worst, a little conversation with such persons would seldom, if ever, fail to satisfy them, and enable them in general to derive encouragement from them : while the unsettling of the minds of such as are carelessly living in an unconverted state is the great end of all our preaching to them ; and therefore we need not fear any bad effect of this doctrine in that respect. The great question therefore was, Are these doctrines in the Bible, or not ? Hitherto I had wilfully passed over and neglected, or endeavoured to put some other construction upon, all those parts of scripture which directly speak of them : but now I began to consider, meditate, and pray over them ; and I soon found that I could not support my former interpretations. They *would* teach predestination, election, and final

perseverance, in spite of all my wresting and expounding. It also occurred to me, that these doctrines, though now in disgrace, were universally believed and maintained by our venerable reformers ; that they were admitted, at the beginning of the reformation, into the creeds, catechisms, or articles, of every one of the protestant churches ; that our articles and homilies expressly maintain them ; and, consequently, that a vast number of wise and sober-minded men, who in their days were “ burning and shining lights,” had upon mature deliberation agreed, not only that they were true, but that they ought to be admitted as useful, or even as necessary articles of faith, by every one who deemed himself called to take upon him the office of a Christian minister.

In the course of this inquiry I perceived that my system was incomplete without them. I believed that men, by nature born in sin, “ the children of wrath,” and “ by wicked works the enemies of God,” being in themselves ungodly and “ without strength,” were saved of free mercy and grace, without having done any thing, more or less, to deserve it, through the

Redeemer's righteousness and atonement, received by faith, the gift and operation of God ; as " born again," " born of God," or new " created unto good works," and to the divine image by the power of the Holy Ghost. It now, therefore, occurred to me to inquire from what source these precious blessings, thus freely flowing, through the channel of redemption, to poor worthless sinners, could originally spring : and thus my mind was carried back from the consideration of the *effects* to that of the *cause* : and from the promises made to fallen man to the counsels and purposes of God which induced him to give those promises. I was engaged in frequent meditations on the divine omniscience, unchangeableness, and eternity ; and the end which the all-sufficient God had in view in all his works, even the manifestation of the glory of his own perfections ; and I perceived, that redemption itself, as planned by God, to whom were " known all his works from " the beginning of the world," must be the result of his eternal purpose of displaying the glory of his mercy and grace, in harmonious consistency with his most awful justice and holiness ; and thus manifesting

the inexhaustible resources of his manifold wisdom in glorifying at once all these attributes, which, considered as *perfect*, seemed to created understanding irreconcilable with each other. I considered, that, until the fall of man and his redemption had manifested the attribute of mercy to sinners, it had, as far as we can learn, been unexercised and undisplayed, and consequently unknown to any but God himself, from all eternity ; nor could he have the glory of it, but must have been considered as so perfect in justice and holiness as to be incapable of mercy, had he not chosen some objects on whom to exercise it, and devised some method of displaying it, in consistency with his other perfections. Thus I perceived redemption to be the effect of a settled design, formed in God's eternal counsels, of manifesting himself to his reasonable creatures, complete and full-orbed in all conceivable perfections. But, as all have transgressed the divine law, and as none are disposed of themselves to embrace his humbling and holy salvation, or even to inquire after it ; so I was convinced that the merciful and gracious nature of God, the Fountain of goodness, alone moved him

to choose any of them as objects of his favourable regard ; that his unconstrained will and pleasure are the only assignable causes of his choosing one rather than another ; and that in fact the whole work was his own ; his wisdom having devised the means : his love and all-sufficiency having, in the person, offices, and works of Christ, made all things ready ; his providence directing absolutely to whom the word of invitation shall be sent ; and his Holy Spirit alone inclining and enabling the soul to embrace it by faith.—Hence I concluded that God, who knoweth the end from the beginning, and is a Sovereign, and, when none have deserved any thing, “ may do as he will with his own,” actually “ chose us” (even every individual believer) “ in Christ, before the foundation of the “ world, that we *should* be holy, and with- “ out blame before him in love : having “ predestinated us unto the adoption of “ children by Jesus Christ to himself, ac- “ cording to the good pleasure of his will ; “ to the praise of the glory of his grace, “ wherein he hath made us accepted in the “ beloved.” (Eph. i. 4—6.)

In short, though my objections were

many, my anxiety great, and my resistance long ; yet, by the evidence which, both from the word of God and from my own meditation, crowded upon my mind, I was at length constrained to submit ; and, God knoweth, with fear and trembling, to allow these formerly despised doctrines a place in my creed. Accordingly, about Christmas 1777, I began cautiously to establish the truth of them, and to make use of them for the consolation of poor distressed and fearful believers. This was the only use I then knew of them ; though I now see their influence on every part of evangelical truth.

However I would observe that, though I assuredly believe these doctrines as far as here expressed, (for I am not willing to trace them any higher, by reasonings, or consequences, into the unrevealed things of God ;) and though I exceedingly need them in my view of religion, both for my own consolation, and for security against the consequences of a deceitful heart, an ensnaring world, and a subtle tempter, as also for the due exercise of my pastoral office ; yet I would not be understood to place the acknowledgment of them upon a level with the belief of the doctrines before

spoken of. I can readily conceive the character of a humble, pious, spiritual Christian, who is either an utter stranger to the doctrines in question, or who, through misapprehension or fear of consequences, cannot receive them. But I own I find a difficulty in conceiving of a humble, pious, spiritual Christian, who is a stranger to his own utterly lost condition, to the deceitfulness and depravity of his heart, to the *natural* alienation of his affections from God, and to the defilements of his best duties ; who trusts, either in whole or in part, *allowedly*, to any thing for pardon and justification, except the blood and righteousness of a crucified Saviour, “ God manifested in the “ flesh ;” or who expects to be “ made “ meet for the inheritance of the saints in “ light,” in any other way than by being born again, created anew, converted, and sanctified, by the divine power of the Holy Ghost.

Some time in November 1777 I was, by a then unknown friend, (the late John Thornton, Esq.,) furnished with a considerable number of books, written in general by the old divines, both of the church of England and of the dissenters. And, to my no small surprise, I found that

those doctrines which are now deemed novel inventions, and are called methodistical, are in these books every where discoursed of as known and allowed truths : and that the system which, despising to be taught by men, and unacquainted with such authors, I had for nearly three years together been hammering out for myself, with no small labour and anxiety, was to be found ready made to my hands in every book I opened.

I do not wonder that the members of the church of England are generally prejudiced against the writings of dissenters ; for I have been so myself to an excessive degree. We imbibe this prejudice with the first rudiments of instruction, and are taught by our whole education to consider it as meritorious : though no doubt it is a prejudice of which every sincere inquirer after truth ought to be afraid, and every professed inquirer ashamed ; for how can we determine on which side truth lies, if we will not examine both sides ? Indeed it is well known to all those who are acquainted with the church-histories of those times, that till the reign of James I. there were no controversies between the established church and

the Puritans concerning doctrine ; both parties being in all matters of importance of the same sentiments : they contended only about discipline and ceremonies, till the introduction of Arminianism gave occasion to the Calvinists being denominated *doctrinal* Puritans. To this period all our church-writers were Calvinistical in doctrine : and even after that time many might be mentioned, who were allowed friends to the church of England, that opposed those innovations, and agreed in doctrine with every thing above stated. Let it suffice, out of many, to recommend the works of Bishop Hall, especially his *Contemplations on the Life of Jesus*, (a book not easily to be prized too highly,) and Dr. Reynolds's Works. To these no true friend to the church of England can reasonably object ; and, in general, I believe and teach nothing but what they plainly taught before me.

The outlines of my scheme of doctrine were now completed : but I had been so taken up with doctrinal inquiries, that I was still in great measure a stranger to my own heart, and had little experience of the power of the truths which I had embraced.

The pride of reasoning, and the conceit of superior discernment, had all along accompanied me ; and, though somewhat broken, had yet considerable influence. Hitherto therefore I had not thought of hearing any person preach ; because I did not think any one, in the circle of my acquaintance, capable of giving me such information as I wanted. But, being at length convinced that Mr. Newton had been right, and that I had been mistaken, in the several particulars in which we had differed ; it occurred to me, that having preached these doctrines so long, he must understand many things concerning them to which I was a stranger. Now, therefore, though not without much remaining prejudice, and not less in the character of a judge than of a scholar, I condescended to be his hearer, and occasionally to attend his preaching and that of some other ministers : and I soon perceived the benefit ; for from time to time the secrets of my heart were discovered to me, far beyond what I had hitherto noticed ; and I seldom returned from hearing a sermon, without having conceived a meaner opinion of myself ; without having attained to a further acquaintance with my de-

ficiencies, weaknesses, corruptions, and wants ; or without being supplied with fresh matter for prayer, and directed to greater watchfulness. I likewise learned the use of experience in preaching ; and was convinced that the readiest way to reach the hearts and consciences of others was to speak from my own. In short, I gradually saw more and more my need of instruction, and was at length brought to consider myself as a very novice in religious matter. Thus I began experimentally to perceive our Lord's meaning, when he says, " Except " ye receive the kingdom of God as a little " child, ye shall in no wise enter therein." For, though my proud heart is continually rebelling, and would fain build up again the former Babel of self-conceit ; yet I trust I have from this time, in my settled judgment, aimed and prayed to be enabled to consider myself as a little child, who ought simply to sit at the Master's feet, to hear his words with profound submission, and wait his teaching with earnest desire and patient attention. From this time I have been enabled to consider those persons in whom knowledge has been ripened by years, experience, and observa-

tion, as fathers and instructors ; to take pleasure in their company, to value their counsels, and with pleasure to attend their ministry.

Thus I trust the old building, which I had purposed to repair, was pulled down to the ground, and the foundation of the new building of God laid aright : “ Old things passed away, behold all things were become new.” “ What things were gain to me, those I have counted loss for Christ.” My boasted reason I have discovered to be a blind guide, until humbled, enlightened, and sanctified by the Spirit of God ; my former wisdom foolishness ; and that when I thought I knew much “ I knew nothing as I ought to know.” Since this period, every thing I have experienced, heard, or read, and every thing I observe around me, confirms and establishes me in the assured belief of those truths which I have received ; nor do I in general any more doubt whether they be from God, than I doubt whether the sun shines when I see its light and am warmed with its refreshing beams. I see the powerful effects of them continually among those to whom I preach : I experience the power

of them daily in my own soul : and while, by meditating on, and “glorying in, the “cross of Christ, I find that the world is “crucified unto me, and I unto the world ;” by preaching Jesus Christ and him crucified, I see notoriously immoral persons “taught “by the saving grace of God to deny un- “godliness and worldly lusts, and to live “soberly, righteously, and godly in this “present world ;” being examples to such as before they were a scandal to.

And now by this change, the consequences of which I so much dreaded, what have I lost, even in respect of this present world ? Indeed I have lost some degree of favour, and I escape not pity, censure, scorn, and opposition : but the Lord is introducing me to a new and far more desirable acquaintance ; even to that of those whom the Holy Spirit hath denominated “the excellent of the earth :” nay, the Lord the Spirit condescends to be my comforter. In general I enjoy an established peace of conscience, through “the blood “of sprinkling,” and continual application to the heavenly Advocate ; with a sweet content, and “that peace of God which “passeth all understanding” in “casting

“all my cares upon Him who careth for
“me :” and I am not left utterly without
experience of that “joy which is unspeak-
“able and full of glory.” These the world
could not give me were I in favour with it ;
of these it cannot deprive me by its frowns.
My desire henceforth, God knoweth, is to
live to his glory, and by my whole conduct
and conversation “to adorn the doctrine
“of God my Saviour,” and “to shew forth
“his praises, who hath called me out of
“darkness into his marvellous light ;” to
be in some way or other useful to his be-
lieving people ; and to invite poor sinners,
who “are walking in a vain shadow, and
“disquieting themselves in vain,” to “taste
and see how gracious the Lord is, and,
“how blessed they are who put their trust
“in him.”

‘ Now would I tell to sinners round,
What a dear Saviour I have found ;
Would point to his redeeming blood,
And cry, Behold the way to God !’

Thus hath the Lord led me, a poor blind
sinner, “in a way that I knew not : he
“hath made darkness light before me,
crooked things straight,” and hard things
easy, and hath brought me to a place of

which I little thought when I set out : and, having done these things for me, I believe, yea I am undoubtedly sure, he “ will never “ leave me nor forsake me.” To him be the glory of his undeserved and long-resisted grace : to me be the shame, not only of all my other sins, but also of my proud and perverse opposition to his purposes of love towards me. But all this was permitted, that, my high spirit and stout heart being at length humbled and subdued, I might “ remember, and be confounded, and “ never open my mouth any more because “ of my shame, now that the Lord is pacified “ to me for all that I have done.”

And now, as in the presence of the heart-searching Judge, I have given, without one wilful misrepresentation, addition, or material omission, a history of the great things “ which God hath done for my soul ;” or, if that suit not the reader’s view of it, a history of that change which has recently taken place in my religious sentiments and conduct, to the surprise of some, and perhaps the displeasure of others, among my former friends. The doctrines I have embraced are indeed charged with being destructive of moral practice, and tending to

licentiousness : but, though I know that my best “righteousnesses are as filthy rags,” yet I trust I may return thanks to God, that by his grace he hath so upheld me, since this change took place, that I have not been permitted to disgrace the cause, in which I have embarked, by any immoral conduct. “My rejoicing,” in this respect, “is this, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, I have my conversation in the world.” I can confidently avow, that the belief of these doctrines has a quite contrary effect upon me than that imputed to them. I most earnestly desire, aim, endeavour, and pray to be enabled to love God, and keep his commandments, “without partiality and without hypocrisy ;” and so to demean myself as “by well doing to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.” That I fall so very far short in every thing is not the effect of my new doctrines, but of my old depraved nature and deceitful heart.—“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me !”

“O my dear sister, I wish you as happy as I am myself, and I need wish you no happier in this world. To call God

“ my father ; to confide in his love ; to realize his powerful
“ presence ; to see by faith his wisdom choosing, his love pro-
“ viding for me, his arm protecting me ; to find him (my sins
“ notwithstanding,) reconciled to me, and engaged to bless
“ me ; to view him seated on a throne of grace, bowing his
“ ear to my poor prayers, granting my requests, supplying
“ my wants, supporting me under every trial, and comforting
“ me by his Holy Spirit ; to look forward to heaven as my
“ home ; and to be able to say at night, when I go to rest,
“ If I die before morning, I shall be with my gracious Lord,
“ to enjoy his love for ever : this is my happiness ; and what
“ is there in the world worth comparing with it ?

‘ Let worldly minds the world pursue,
It has no charms for me ;
Once I admired its trifles too,
But grace has set me free.’

“ Peace with God, peace of conscience, peace in my family,
“ peace with all around me,—these are *the blessings of peace*
“ which God gives his people. May God give them to you!”—
Letter of July 27, 1779.

PART III.

Observations on the preceding Narrative.

My design in writing this account of myself, and of my religious inquiries and change of sentiments, was this : I considered myself as a singular instance of a very unlikely person, in an uncommon manner, being led on from one thing to another, to embrace a system of doctrine which he once heartily despised. As I assuredly believed that this change had been effected under the guidance and teaching of the Holy Spirit ; so I hoped that a circumstantial relation of it might be an encouragement and comfort to those who know and love the Lord, and from them levy a tribute of gratitude and praise to our gracious God : and that it might also be instrumental, in the hands of the convincing Spirit, to awaken others to a serious review of their religious sentiments ; to put them upon the same earnest inquiry after “ the truth as it is in Jesus ;” and to influence

them to the diligent use of the same blessed means, in which the Lord directed me to be found. I would therefore now offer a few observations on the preceding narrative : and may the Lord guide both the writer and every reader of these pages to the saving knowledge of the truth, and into the ways of peace and righteousness !

I. It must be evident to every unprejudiced reader of this narrative, that at the time this change commenced I was, humanly speaking, a most unlikely person to embrace the system of doctrine above stated. This will appear from the following considerations.

1. My religious opinions had been for many years directly contrary to it. Being always of a reflecting turn of mind, I entertained exceedingly high notions of the powers of human reason ; and I had, upon reasoning principles, embraced a system of religion which both soothed my conscience and flattered my self-conceit. After some trivial alterations I seemed to myself, upon mature deliberation, to have come to a settled determination, and had bestowed considerable pains in making myself acquainted with those arguments and interpre-

tations of scripture, by which that system is usually defended : and I had collected together many of those plausible objections and high charges, which are commonly brought by reasoning men against the doctrines and characters of the Calvinists. But I was in great measure a stranger to what the Calvinists could say for themselves ; because I thought the matter too plain to bear an argument, and therefore did not think their answers worth reading. In short, very few have been recovered from that abyss of error (for so I must call it,) into which I had been permitted to sink. Full of confidence in my cause, and in the arguments with which I was prepared to support it, I was eager to engage in controversy with the Calvinists, and entertained the most sanguine hopes of victory. In this confidence I frequently harangued against them from the pulpit, and spared not to charge upon them consequences both absurd and shocking. Yet, after much, very much, anxious, diligent inquiry, I have embraced, as the sacred truths of God's unerring word, every doctrine of this despised system !

2. My natural spirit and temper were very unfavourable to such a change. Few

persons have ever been more self-sufficient, and positive in their opinions, than I was. Fond to excess of entering into argument, I never failed on these occasions to betray this peculiarity of my character. I seldom acknowledged or suspected myself to be mistaken ; and scarcely ever dropped an argument, till either my reasoning or my obstinacy had silenced my opponent. A certain person once said of me, that I was like a stone rolling down a hill, which could neither be stopped nor turned. This witness was true : but those things which are impossible with man are easy with God. I am evidently both stopped and turned : man I am persuaded could not have done it ; but “ this hath God wrought : ” and I am not more a wonder to others than to myself. Indeed I carried the same obstinate positive temper into my religious inquiries : for I never gave up one tittle of my sentiments till I could defend it no longer ; nor ever submitted to conviction till I could no longer resist. The strong man, armed with my natural pride and obstinacy, with my vain imaginations and reasonings, and high thoughts, had built himself many strong holds, and kept his

castle in my heart ; and when One stronger than he came against him he stood a long siege : till, being by superior force driven from one hold to another, and “ all his armour in which he trusted ” being at length “ taken from him,” he was constrained to yield. So that, the Lord having made me willing in the day of his power, I was forced to confess, “ O Lord, thou art stronger “ than I, and hast prevailed.”

3. My situation in life rendered such a change improbable. I had an increasing family, no private fortune, a narrow and precarious income, and no expectations except from such friends as my conduct might procure or continue to me. I had unexpectedly contracted an acquaintance with some of those whose favour goes a great way towards a man's advancement in life ; nor was I insensible to the advantages to be hoped for from cultivating, by a compliant behaviour, their kind and friendly regard to me. At the same time I was no stranger to the opinion which the world entertains of those who preach these disreputable doctrines ; and could not but conclude that embracing them would probably deprive me of these prospects of preferment.

But, as the result of diligent inquiry, I was assuredly convinced that it was my indispensable duty to profess and preach them, and that by so doing alone I could ensure to myself the favour of a better Friend than any here below : and thus, while fully aware all along how unfavourable, according to human probability, it would prove to my worldly interests, I at length deliberately embraced them.

4. My regard to character was no trifling security against such a change of sentiment. I was ambitiously and excessively fond of “ that honour which cometh from man ;” and I considered the desire of praise as allowable, nay laudable. By this motive was I urged on to a very diligent prosecution of my studies, even beyond what natural inclination led me to ; and my whole conduct was influenced by this vain-glorious aim, my whole conversation tinged with it. On the other hand, with approbation and self-complacency, I had been accustomed to hear the most contemptuous and opprobrious epithets liberally bestowed on those persons to whom I have now joined myself : and all along, as I verged nearer and nearer to *methodism*, I was pain-

fully sensible that I was drawing upon myself the same mortifying distinctions. I have been a vain-glorious candidate for human applause : but I renounce such pretensions, and willingly submit to be considered by the world under the mortifying character of a half-witted, crack-brained enthusiast. These epithets I am sensible are now bestowed upon me behind my back, nay, very often to my face : I bless God, however, this does not move me ; but I can heartily thank him, that I am “ counted worthy to suffer shame for his sake.” But, when I saw the trial approaching, it appeared very formidable ; and I can truly affirm that nothing but the fullest conviction, that the cause in which I was embarking was the cause of God ; nothing but not daring to act contrary to the plain dictates of my conscience ; could have influenced me to make this sacrifice of my character, and bring upon myself so much scorn and contempt.

5. To reason with our despisers upon their own principles : If I am now fallen into enthusiasm, mistake, and strong delusion, I certainly was when I first set out in this inquiry, a very unlikely person so

to do. My leading resolve was to search for the truth diligently, and to embrace it wherever I found it, and whatever it might cost. No sooner had I begun the enquiry, than I was called upon to give proof of the sincerity of this resolution ; and from a principle of conscience, though a mistaken one, I renounced my prospect of immediate preferment : and it would be uncandid to question my sincerity after it had been thus evidenced. Since that time I have also deliberately sacrificed my character, and hazarded the loss of all my former friends. Giving these proofs of integrity, I set off in dependence on those plain promises which I have mentioned ; I have sought this desired knowledge of the truth chiefly in reading the Holy Scriptures, and by prayer for the promised teaching of the Holy Ghost, in the manner which has been related ; and I am now led to conclusions diametrically opposite to what I expected ! —Now lay all these things together, and attentively consider them ; and then let your own consciences determine how far it is probable, that a person in this manner seeking for the truth, should be “ given over to a strong delusion ” to believe a

pernicious lie. “ If a son shall ask bread
“ of any of you that is a father, will he give
“ him a stone ? or, if he ask a fish, will he
“ for a fish give him a serpent ; or, if he
“ shall ask an egg, will he give him a scor-
“ pion ? If ye then, being evil, know how
“ to give good gifts unto your children,
“ how much more shall your heavenly
“ Father give the Holy Spirit to them that
“ ask him ? ” Can any man suppose that,
after such repeated and continued pleadings
of the express promises of the Lord to this
effect in earnest prayer, according to his
appointment, I should be delivered up to
the teaching of the father of lies ? Can
any one make this conclusion without an
evident insinuation that God hath broken
his promises ? In short, you may make a
jest of the narrative ; you may throw by
the book without giving any attention to
an argument of this kind ; you may say,
what you never can prove, that it is all a
contrived story ; or you may argue, that
these promises, though contained in the
Bible, are not to be depended on by us,
which is to give up the scriptures to be
scoffed at by infidels and atheists, and to
render them useless to the humble anxious

inquirer after truth and salvation : but by no other means, I am assured, can you account for this single circumstance, without allowing, that *the substance* of those doctrines, which I have now embraced, is indeed contained in the word of God ; that they comprise “ the truth as it is in Jesus,” and are not corrupted with any such delusion as can hazard the salvation of my soul, or of the souls of those who by my ministry receive them.—On this supposition all difficulties vanish. The Lord had given me a sincere desire to know the saving doctrine of the gospel ; and, though I was exceedingly ignorant, obstinate, and prejudiced, yet, this desire having, according to his direction, led me to the word of God, and influenced me to seek his teaching by prayer, he was faithful to his own promises, and it was an example of his own words, “ every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth.” My evident sincerity in seeking the truth was sufficient to convince any person, conversant and experienced in the things of God, that, as my friend foretold, thither would all my inquiries lead me ; in that would they all finally centre. And, could I be assured,

beloved reader, whoever thou art, that thou wast as sincerely desirous to know the truth as I then was, and as heartily resolved to embrace it wherever thou mightest find it, and whatever it should cost thee ; had I also assurance, that, in a beliving dependence on these promises, thou wast diligently and from day to day, in the study of the word of God and prayer, seeking the accomplishment of them ; I would as confidently foretel, that, as to those things which I now regard as essential to salvation, and, if thou hast the souls of others committed to thee, as to what is needful for thy usefulness in the ministry, thou wouldst be brought in time to these same conclusions, whatever thy present religious sentiments may be. May the Lord give thee true sincerity, and incline thine heart to try the experiment !

I am aware that many will object to what I have argued on this head, as being too confident ; and as being what is urged by men of contrary religious sentiments, each in behalf of his own system : and, as I would not leave any material and plausible objection in force against what I have advanced, I hope the reader will excuse my

obviating this beforehand. I would therefore intreat those, who object to the confidence with which this argument is brought forward, *impartially and carefully to consider the limitations with which on every hand it is guarded* ; and then to enquire, whether in any other way, than that which has been mentioned, they can account for the fact. That is, supposing this narrative true, (for which the appeal is to the heart-searching God,) and supposing the promises mentioned to be proposed to us, that we may embrace them, depend on them, and plead them in prayer, considering the glory of the divine veracity as concerned in their accomplishment to every believer ; let them try whether they can possibly evade one of these conclusions :—either that God hath failed of his promise ; or that he hath in the main, and as far as is expressed, led the author by his Holy Spirit to the knowledge and belief of the truth.—As to the confidence of men of opposite sentiments, I observe, that many, who speaks in high terms concerning sincerity and candour, will without hesitation condemn as enthusiastical, such reliance on the promises, and this way of

searching for truth ; and it is plain that they do not seek truth in that manner which they condemn in others. Many others perhaps slightly mention these matters, but they will not endure to be closely questioned : for, being conscious that they have not sought the truth in this manner, they evade such discourse as personal. Again, the writings of many professed inquirers after truth evidently shew that they expect to find it, not by “ trusting the Lord “ with all their heart,” or seeking it from the scriptures, and by earnest prayer for the teaching of the Holy Spirit ; but by “ leaning to their own understanding ; ” resting the argument on philosophical reasonings, and the authority of this or that renowned name ; and supporting their conclusions by bold and perplexing criticisms and interpretations of scripture. Hence so many daring appeals from revelation to reason and philosophy ! Hence such and so many objections, brought against doctrines plainly revealed in God’s word, if language hath any determinate meaning ! and so many consequences charged upon these doctrines, with a design to invalidate their divine authority ; as if the appearance

of unreasonableness, imposed by every disingenuous art, were sufficient to prove the plainest revelation of God's Holy Spirit a falsehood ! Hence such liberty in interpretation and criticism on the word of God, as the learned would never endure in interpreting or criticising Virgil or Horace ! These things prove that such persons are strangers to that earnest, hearty, sincere desire to know the truth, which brings the inquirer to a humble willingness to be taught of God, and in submission of understanding to seek wisdom from his word and Spirit. It is indeed most evident that many, who profess to be influenced by this sincere desire to know the truth, are not troubled with suspicions that they are, or can be, wrong. They have made up their minds before they begin the inquiry : and you will not find them willing to make the least concession, but, in the management of the controversy, resolved to vindicate and contend for every tittle ; and, where arguments fail, to make use of the other arts of controversy, with which skill in the management of their weapons, and anger against their opponents, can supply them. Where a cause is thus maintained, you may

easily know that there is none of that earnest desire of learning the truth, that anxious fear of mistaking it, that self-diffidence, and those doubts concerning the sentiments held at present, which constitute the godly sincerity, that leads the inquirer to the word and Spirit of God for direction and teaching. These things taken together will, on scriptural grounds, cut off many confident pretenders to sincerity from their claims, as entirely as they exclude Annas and Caiaphas, and the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees, from being sincere inquirers into the truth of the Old Testament ; when, in support of their authority and reputation and influenced by pride and anger, they, under colour of their law, put to death Him, “ of whom Moses and the prophets “ did write, even Jesus of Nazareth,” the Son of God.—And, as to men of another spirit, who appear sincere, humble, and willing to be taught of God, in their inquiry after truth, but do not entirely agree with what has been laid down ; I would only wish them to observe the distinction established between some and others of these doctrines. Such persons do not, I dare say, materially differ from that which

has been mentioned as necessary to salvation : as, therefore, I allow them to have been in the main taught of God, so I only require the same allowance. Let it be supposed, that the same God who according to his promise has led both, as far as is needful to salvation, in the same way, has in other things left us to differ, for the mutual exercise of candour and forbearance, till that time when we shall “ know “ even as we are known.”

II. I would observe, that this change in my sentiments took place very gradually.

When any person suddenly changes his religious opinions for others very different from them, it is no inconsiderable evidence of a changeable and fickle disposition. It gives cause to suspect that he was not well established in his former sentiments ; and that he had taken them upon trust, and was a stranger to the arguments by which they might be defended, and to the objections which might be urged against them. If worldly interest, reputation, or convenience seem to favour the change, there is room for a presumption that these had an undue influence upon him : if not, it may be insinuated that he was deluded with

specious appearances ; that he did not allow himself time to weigh the arguments on each side ; and that he had only changed one set of notions for another, without having duly considered either of them. Such objections may reasonably be made, and the consequences of precipitate changes too often justify them. But, though I was always, and still am of a head-long impetuous spirit in other things ; and when once I have purposed can have no rest from incessant agitation of mind till I have accomplished my design ; yet in this particular I acted in direct opposition to my natural temper. Indeed at first I did in some instances too much betray my impetuosity : but at that time I acted not in the character of an inquirer, but in full confidence that I was pleading the cause of truth, and had no more thought of becoming what the world calls a methodist, than of turning Mohammedan. But after that first hurry was over, though commonly in earnest, and sometimes in considerable perturbation of mind, I was outwardly calm and satisfied ; being generally enabled to believe that, if I were in any thing at present mistaken, I should some time be

guided to the truth. My determination to set about this inquiry proceeded not so much from anxious fears about my own soul, as from a deep sense, impressed upon my heart, of the importance of my ministry, the worth of the souls committed to my charge, and the awful account to be given of them ; and, as I all along bestowed some pains in instructing my people in what I believed to be the truth, I was preserved from my discomposing fears, or undue disquietude of mind. I sat down very coolly to search for the truth ; I proceeded very gradually, and with extreme caution ; I took no one opinion upon trust ; I gave up none of my sentiments, until the arguments by which I had learned to defend them were satisfactorily answered ; nor did I admit any new articles into my creed, till either every objection was obviated, or I was pressed on the other hand with such as were still more unanswerable. Much, very much prayer and meditation preceded every change of sentiment ; and I was nearly three years, from the beginning of my inquiry, before I came to determination what was truth. So long, deliberately, and step by step, I examined

the premises before I finally proceeded to draw my conclusion. I perceive much cause to be ashamed of my unteachable temper : for, with such opportunities as were afforded me, if I had improved them, I might have attained to the knowledge and belief of the same truths in much less time. But the Lord, I trust, led me in his way, and left me thus far to my own natural pride of heart ; that it might more evidently appear, that I received not my doctrines from man, but that indeed, in the first instance, I learned them from the word and Spirit of God.

III. I would observe, that I changed my religious views without any teaching from the persons to whose sentiments I have now acceded. For a considerable time after the commencement of my inquiries, I would not so much as read what they had to urge in their own behalf. I entered indeed into a correspondence with Mr. Newton ; but my intention was not to learn from him, but to dispute with him ; and when he waved controversy I dropped the correspondence, and utterly neglected his letters. From that time I avoided his company, and all the while I declined hear-

ing him preach. I would not be understood to insinuate that Mr. N. has not been useful to me : he has been, and continues to be eminently so : and I continually see great cause to bless God for giving me such a friend, to be so near at hand on all occasions. But this I assuredly believe, that had I never seen him, at least from the time that his example had put me upon considering my conduct, I should have arrived at the same views of evangelical truth which I now have. His usefulness to me has all along been in those matters in which we were in some measure agreed, not in those in which we differed ; for, as to these, my proud heart scorned to have him for a teacher.

At the same time, though I had the offer of several books written by dissenters and methodists, I declined it ; and did not, for nearly two years, peruse any of them with sufficient attention to recollect any thing of consequence which they contained. I say not this as slighting these books, for justice requires me to acknowledge that many, which then I ignorantly despised, contain as solid, judicious, and excellent divinity, as has been penned since the days

of the apostles. But I did not get my system from them : for that was nearly complete before I was prevailed upon to read them. My studies, besides the Bible, were chiefly confined to authors of allowed reputation in the Church of England, several of which I have mentioned. When they differed from each other, (as certainly Tillotson and Hooker, Jortin and Beveridge, Bull and Hall, do differ very much indeed,) I endeavoured to judge for myself, comparing all of them with the word of God, and with the articles, homilies, and liturgy of the church of England : and from such authors thus compared, as far as the writings of uninspired men have been instrumental to this change, I have received the greatest part of my present opinions.

But let it be observed that, the further these streams are traced upward towards the fountain of the blessed reformation, the purer, according to my present judgment, they flow : and that it may easily and undeniably be proved, that there is nothing material preached by many regular clergymen of the establishment, under the scandal of *methodism*, which was not expressly taught by those excellent persons, who,

having laid the foundation of our church, gave their bodies to be burned in confirmation of their doctrine. It is greatly to be wished that their lives and discourses, living and dying, and their remaining writings, were more generally known among us ; and did not remain locked up from the world, in large folios, in the learned languages, and in books out of print, or exceedingly scarce : ¹ in consequence of which the members of our national church are in general utterly ignorant of its standard doctrines, and ignorantly brand those as methodists and enthusiasts, who preach zealously the very doctrines of the first reformers.

IV. I would observe the great influence which the study of the scriptures had in producing this change.

We are all too apt, without careful examination, to take things for granted, especially in respect of religion. We often collect our scheme of divinity from other authors, or from our own reasonings and imaginations : and only seek for a few de-

¹ This wish has at length been realized in many recent publications, especially 'The Fathers of the English Church,' in eight volumes octavo.

tached texts which appear to countenance our preconceived opinions ; neglecting, or very slightly considering, such parts of the word of God as seem incapable of being made use of to our purpose. We are likewise too prone, in availing ourselves of the labours of critics and expositors, to resign up ourselves implicitly to their guidance, and to imagine that we have proof enough of our doctrines, if we can produce the sanction of some great name that has espoused and maintained them, without carefully examining whether they be right or wrong : but this is to pay that deference to the human interpretation, which is due only to the divine book commented on. We ministers especially, though at our ordination we solemnly promise to turn all our studies, as much as may be, into this channel, are very apt to suffer our time and thoughts to be engrossed with such studies and employments as are foreign to our profession, and interfere with it, and which leave at most but a secondary attention for the study of the word of God. And who can deny, that many do not bestow so much pains in meditating upon the Bible, and in comparing spiritual things with spi-

ritual, or one part of scripture with another, and every part with what they experience in their own hearts, and what they hear and see in the world around them, as they do about matters of far less consequence? So that probably, should they at any time sit down to a diligent examination of the whole word of God, they would find it a very different book than they expected, Thus, at least, it has been with me, and possibly it may be so with many others.

The word of God informs us that true wisdom, the saving, practical, and experimental knowledge of divine things, is not to be acquired without earnest and diligent seeking; “My son; if thou wilt receive
“my words and hide my commandments
“with thee; so that thou incline thine ear
“unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to
“understanding; yea, if thou criest after
“knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for
“understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the
“fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge
“of God.” (Prov. ii. 1—6) If then our wisdom has been acquired, without any of that eagerness and painful diligence with

which the covetous man desires and seeks for his riches ; it is a shrewd conjecture, that it is not of the genuine sort. Once I had in my own esteem a sort of wisdom, which seemed to offer itself to me spontaneously, and to be found with little seeking. But now I am persuaded that it was a mere counterfeit, a fair-seeming pernicious foolishness.

That which I now esteem to be true wisdom, if I could but attain to it, is not to be acquired in so easy a manner. When I first began to desire and seek this wisdom, I set out with the assurance that it was to be found in the holy scriptures, and nowhere else ; they alone being able “ to make us wise unto salvation.” I therefore considered myself engaged to make them my study ; and, as the whole was “ given by inspiration from God,” and was all declared to be “ profitable,” according to the various ends which the Holy Spirit designed in it ; I made the whole my study. Thus I learned to look upon the Bible as my book of instructions, given me along with the ministerial office by my Lord and Master ; that from thence I might deduce all my doctrines, instructions, and admoni-

tions, warnings, examples, encouragements, rules of duty, and motives to duty : and I also considered it to be the believer's charter of privileges, containing exceedingly great and precious promises, and the whole of that which God saw fit to reveal, concerning those unspeakable and inconceivable good things which he hath of his infinite mercy prepared for them that love him. In order therefore faithfully to declare my message from the Lord Almighty to the souls of men, I found it indispensably needful to be well acquainted with every part, and to take the word of God myself, as well as propose it to others, as “ the lantern of “ my feet, and the light of my paths : ” not only attending to the *letter*, but also to the true *meaning*, “ the mind of the Spirit ” of God in it. This I found to be a work that required much time, great diligence, mature consideration, and an unbiassed unprejudiced mind.

With this view of the matter partly obtained, and continually more and more unfolding itself, I studied the word of God ; and have now for nearly four years thus employed a very considerable part of my time, neither rejecting, nor yet greatly de-

pending on, the assistance of interpreters. I sincerely desired to know the truth, and for that end I read the scriptures, “not as
“the word of man, but as the word of God.” And, though there have been seasons of remissness, when other employments and studies too much interfered with this main business ; and though at first I was very far from an unbiassed mind, being blindly and obstinately prejudiced against those doctrines which I now believe to be the true gospel of Jesus Christ ; yet, in that space, I have read the Bible many times over, in every part, with the strictest attention of which I have been capable. There are very few passages which relate to doctrine, that I have not repeatedly and diligently examined, comparing one with another, with all the care and consideration I could ; and I seldom ever ceased meditating on any portion of scripture, till I had attained to some satisfying conclusion concerning its true meaning, and its agreement with other scriptures. I may truly say I have filled reams of paper with religious discussions, with sermons, expositions, and letters ; in all which I ransacked the Bible, to bring as much scriptural

evidence for my direction as possible. For these last two years I have scarcely opened a book except upon religious subjects, and from morning till night, nearly every day, all this time, my thoughts incessantly have been employed in meditation upon the great truths of the gospel. Every difficulty and objection (and difficulties and objections, both from my own meditations and in the course of my reading, continually crowded upon my mind,) sent me to the word of God, and increased my care and attention in examining and weighing every text of scripture respecting the point in question, before I exchanged my old opinion for a new one.

Thus I may truly say, I have sought in the word of God, (that field in which alone this precious treasure lies hid,) “for wisdom,” for the saving knowledge of divine things, “as for silver, and searched for her “as for hid treasures.” And though I am sensible that my knowledge is still comparatively superficial, the knowledge of a child, of a novice in the school of Christ : yet I trust that as far as relates to the leading truths of the gospel, I am brought, according to the promise, “to understand

“ the fear of the Lord, and have found the
“ knowledge of God.”

Permit me now, beloved reader, to put thee in remembrance, that, until thou hast with some good measure of this diligence, studied the whole word of God, thou runnest very great hazards in passing judgment upon men and doctrines. Be cautious what thou doest; “ let these men ” quite “ alone,” until thou hast imitated the conduct of the noble Bereans, and thoroughly, and with unbiassed mind, examined and meditated upon the whole word of God, to see whether the things which they believe and teach be so or not: lest otherwise it should come to pass, (as probably it will,) that, in opposing and condemning them, thou shouldst “ be found to fight against “ God.”—Oh! that the Lord would hear and grant my request, and by his Holy Spirit powerfully incline the hearts of all who read these sheets, according to their leisure, station in life, obligations, and opportunities, thus attentively to read their Bibles; not as the word of men, but as the word of God himself, speaking from heaven unto them, and concerning the everlasting interests of their precious and immortal

souls ! Be the adviser what he may, despised and deserving to be despised, the advice is undoubtedly good : advice he will have no occasion to repent of having given, at the solemn hour of death, and the awful day of judgment : advice, which at those approaching seasons, none will repent having followed ; though it should divert them from more amusing and, at this day, more reputable studies ; or engross that time which they have been accustomed to devote to more pleasurable and fashionable employments ; but which, neglected, will be an additional sting in every conscience through all the countless ages of eternity.

And oh ! that they, to whom the chief Shepherd hath committed the care of precious souls, and at whose hands he will assuredly require every one that perishes through their default, would take in good part this expression of the very affectionate desire of my soul, both in behalf of them and of their flocks, in dropping these hints concerning their peculiar obligations to devote much of their time to the attentive unbiased study of the word of God, that infinitely best, but often least studied, of all books ! What avails it that the ministers

of the everlasting gospel should be learned classical scholars, profound philosophers, metaphysicians and mathematicians, expert logicians, or adorned with the knowledge of the politer sciences ; if they are unacquainted, or but superficially acquainted, with the sacred scriptures ? These other branches of literature may amuse and entertain them, may procure them preferment, reputation, respect, and favour ; but the knowledge of the Bible alone can enable them in such a manner to “ take heed to themselves and to their doctrine,” as shall issue in the everlasting salvation of their own souls, and the souls committed to their care. Far be it from me to presume to lay down my opinions as the standard of doctrine, or a rule for the faith and preaching of my brethren in the sacred ministry ! But, the more obscure I am, the less objection can there reasonably be against my hinting to them, that, if any one should find this subject manifest itself to his conscience, and make him sensible that verily he hath been faulty in attending to other employments, and studying other books more than the word of God ; then, possibly, he may be mistaken in his sentiments con-

cerning the doctrines of the gospel, and, being mistaken himself, may be misleading others, to the endangering of their immortal souls : for he cannot be certain, but that, should he employ some years in this single study, (which its importance well deserves,) he may find the Bible a very different book than he expected.

V. I would observe the influence which *prayer* appears to have had in affecting this change.

I am aware that the world, though called Christian, is come to such a pass, that the very mention of this subject in many companies is accounted ill manners, or even received with ridicule ; and that being known to maintain constant communion with God, “ by prayer and supplication “ with thanksgiving,” is alone sufficient to denominate any person a methodist. It is however most certain that the word of God is full of precepts, instructions, exhortations, invitations, promises, and examples to this effect. He never read his Bible who knows not this ; nor can any man, under any pretence whatever, make a jest of this great duty and privilege, without pouring contempt upon the holy scriptures ; and

insulting the brightest characters there proposed to us as examples, not excepting the Lord Jesus himself. Let men, therefore, under the profession of Christianity, be as irreligious and profane as they please, I shall not be ashamed to speak upon so unfashionable a topic : for, if the word of God be true, he never knew any thing as he ought to know, never believed, never repented, never performed one duty aright in his life, who hath not sought all his wisdom, knowledge, faith, repentance, and sufficiency for obedience from God, by fervent, instant, persevering prayer. Time was, even since I had souls committed to my care, that I lived in the neglect of this duty, and so “ without God in the world ; ” but since, through his forbearance and mercy, I have been in earnest about the salvation of my own soul, and the souls of other men, my conduct in this respect has been very different.

“ If ye, being evil, know how to give
“ good gifts unto your children, how much
“ more shall your heavenly Father give the
“ Holy Spirit to them that ask him ? ” and
“ if any man have not the spirit of Christ
“ he is none of his.” As he is the Spirit

of truth, it is his office to “lead us into all truth,” and “to teach us all things:” for he “searches” and reveals “the deep things of God.” It is expressly promised to the true church, that “all her children shall be taught of the Lord.” (Isa. liv. 13.) Referring to this, Christ hath declared, that “none can come unto him, except he be drawn of the Father,” and “taught of God.” (John vi. 44, 45.) And St. Paul declares, that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor. ii. 44) The *natural man* (*ψυχικος*) is explained in Jude, by “not having the Spirit;” which is evidently the apostle’s meaning in this passage: for in the preceding verse he declares that he preached the gospel, “not in words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”—On these grounds I concluded that man’s natural understanding could not, spiritually or profitably, receive the knowledge of revealed mysteries, unless it were enlightened by the Holy Spirit. I learned also

that our eyes may be “ blinded ” by Satan, the god and prince of this world ; that our understandings may be closed, and “ a veil “ be upon our hearts,” when we read the word of God ; in which case the letter of the scriptures, without the Spirit, only “ killeth.” Hence the need of the “ understanding being opened to understand “ the scriptures : ” for want of which the plainest discourses of our Lord to his disciples, concerning his sufferings, death, and resurrection, were hidden from them and they understood them not. The veil also must be taken from the heart ; for want of which the Jews, in reading the Old Testament, cannot understand the plainest declaration of Moses and the prophets, concerning their promised Saviour.

The scriptures also every where declare that true wisdom is the gift of God, and must be asked of him by every one who would be wise unto salvation ; that “ the “ secret of the Lord is with them that “ fear him ; ” and that those “ who receive “ not the love of the truth, that they may be “ saved, are given over to a strong delusion to believe a lie ; that they might “ all be damned who believe not the truth,

“ but have pleasure in unrighteousness.”
(2 Thess. ii. 10—12.)

On these grounds, and depending upon the promises and invitations so plentifully interspersed throughout the scriptures, when I began to inquire after the truth, I was led also in some measure to cry unto the Lord for his guidance and teaching: and, as my mind grew more engaged, and my difficulties in extricating myself from the labyrinths of controversy increased I became more and more earnest, constant, particular, in “ making my requests known “ unto God.” My constant prayer to the Lord was, to be delivered from pride and prejudice, blindness of heart, contempt of the truth, obstinacy, enthusiasm, ignorance, and error; and that the Lord would give me wisdom and knowledge, guide me to the truth “ as it is in Jesus,” open my understanding, take away “ the veil from my “ heart,” and make known unto me the way of salvation which is revealed to sinners in his holy word. Thus, waiting upon the Lord according to his own appointment, depending on him and pleading his promises from day to day, I was led from one thing to another, until my view of re-

ligious truth was totally changed. This I most firmly believe to have been by the promised teaching of the Spirit of truth, powerfully enlightening my mind, opening the scriptures, and, by dispelling the clouds of error and prejudice, enabling me to receive the truth in faith and love. I am conscious that I have no intention, in speaking thus publicly on such a subject, but to advance the glory of God in the salvation of souls. But, as in his presence, I must declare that I have prayed over many of the most interesting passages of scripture, chapter by chapter, and often verse by verse, with the most anxious dread of rejecting or mistaking the truth, or embracing a falsehood: and with the most earnest desire of knowing what that doctrine was, which Jesus and his apostles taught. In the sight of God, I am sensible, I have abundant cause to be humbled, and ashamed of my frequent remissness, and the continual defilement of my prayers: but, as surely as I believe his promises to be faithful, as surely as I believe him to be a God “that heareth prayer,” so surely do I believe, that “flesh and blood hath not “revealed” to me the doctrines I now

preach, but God himself by his Holy Spirit.

The Park of Weston Underwood was the frequent scene of Mr. S.'s first deep meditations upon the sacred writings. He spoke of having read through the Greek Testament, employing about three hours upon each chapter ; and very frequently, when the weather would permit, passing this time in the walks and amid the plantations which have since been immortalized in the writings of Cowper. See his life, p. 99.

Reader, whoever thou art, if thy conscience testifies that thou hast hitherto lived in the neglect of this important duty, or in the formal, lifeless, unmeaning performance of it with thy lips, while thy heart hath been disengaged, and thy thoughts allowedly wandering to the ends of the earth : if thou hast not been accustomed, by fervent prayer, to seek wisdom from God by his teaching Spirit : if thou knowest not what it is to exercise faith upon the promises pointed out to thee, nor to plead them in prayer to a promise-keeping God : if all thy knowledge of divine things hath been acquired by “ leaning to thy own understanding : ” if in reading the scriptures thou hast looked more to learned critics, commentators, and expositors, than to the illuminating Spirit of God : then be as sure as the word of God is true, and as we are concerned in it, that “ the light which

“ is in thee is darkness,” and that thou
“ knowest nothing yet as thou oughtest to
“ know.” May the Lord effectually incline
thine heart to take a contrary course, and
to seek wisdom where alone it can be
found, even from the Lord, “ the Father
“ of lights,” and “ the giver of every good
“ and perfect gift,” who hath invited and
commanded thee to ask that it may be
given thee !

VI. I would observe, that there is nothing in this narrative which can reasonably be condemned as enthusiasm.

It is allowed that enthusiasm, properly so called, is a frequent attendant on religious zeal ; that in some of its operations it is a grievous evil, and in all attended with many inconveniences : and that it ought very carefully to be guarded against by every religious professor and zealous preacher. It would also be in vain to pretend that the late revivals of religion, which have been indiscriminately stigmatized with the name of methodism, have been in opinion and practice entirely free from this enthusiasm. For what revivals of religion ever were free from scandals ? Where the Lord sows his good seed, there the enemy will be sure

to scatter his tares. It must be confessed, that some of the most eminent instruments in this work, whose names, when prejudice shall vanish, will be handed down with honour, as “ burning and shining lights,” to the latest periods of the church ; have by the greatness of their zeal, through human frailty, been betrayed into sentiments, expressions, and deportment in some instances, justly to be censured as enthusiastical ; of which their enemies have not failed sufficiently to avail themselves. But, whatever indiscretions and mistakes particular persons who have preached these doctrines may have fallen into, this does not, in the judgment of candid and impartial persons, in the least affect the general cause, or prove the doctrines erroneous. We would not contend for the credit of individuals, or the interests of a party, but for the doctrines of God’s word, and of the established church of England. These will continue true and important, though many of those who have zealously and successfully preached them may have justly incurred the charge of enthusiasm : and I would confidently insist on it, that a man may be led to the belief of these doctrines in a way

of sober rational inquiry, and zealously preach them without being an enthusiast.

It would be very well, if some of those, who so readily accuse whole bodies of apparently religious persons of enthusiasm, would favour us with their determinate definition of an enthusiast. In its original meaning the word has a very favourable sense, and implies that, by a *divine* influence upon the soul, a man is filled with an ardour and warmth of zeal in the cause in which he is engaged. Now “it is good to
“be zealously affected always in a good
“thing:” and, if our ardour of soul be from the Spirit of God, according to the revealed will of God, and for the glory of God, it is the noblest, most desirable, most heavenly and most beneficial exertion of the human mind.—In every thing but religion an ardour, described by the term enthusiasm, is allowed and commended: a poetical, a military, a patriotic enthusiasm, even when it carries men beyond the strict bounds of cold reasons and exact prudence, fails not to meet with admirers. Our zeal may be fervent in every thing without censure, unless we be zealous for the glory of God and the salvation of im-

mortal souls. But there is an enthusiasm of this sort, which forms the highest elevation, and the noblest effort of the human mind. Such an enthusiasm animated the apostle Paul in all his self-denying labours and sufferings, and filled his writings (under the guidance of the Holy Ghost,) with the most ardent zeal for the honour of his beloved Saviour, and affection for the souls of men. Such an enthusiasm he expresses when he says, “Whether we be beside
“ourselves it is to God, or whether we be
“sober, it is for your cause ; for the love of
“Christ constraineth us.” (2 Cor. v. 13, 14.) Of this enthusiasm I wish I were far more *guilty*.—But, on the other hand, there is danger of a counterfeit, pernicious enthusiasm ; and about that we are at present inquiring. Now I apprehend that, in order to constitute this culpable enthusiasm, some one or more of the following things must appear : either the ardour of soul excited proceeds from a heated imagination, or from a delusion of Satan, instead of being produced by a divine influence ; or the cause in which this ardour is employed is the cause of error and wickedness, instead of the cause of God and truth ; or it exerts

itself in unjustifiable measures and practices. For, if our ardour be warranted by the word of God, if it do not tend to the dishonour of God, and if it be confined in its exercise to the rules and precepts of the word of God ; how intense soever it may be, I can see no cause to censure it ; unless men can be too zealous for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

But, whatever be the distinguishing criterion of enthusiasm, I suppose it will be difficult to fix a charge of it upon any thing for which I plead in this narrative. I never was taught by impulses, impressions, visions, dreams, or revelations ; except so far as the work of the Spirit, in enlightening the understanding for the reception of the truths contained in the holy scriptures, is sometimes styled revelation. (See Eph. i. 17.) Other revelation I never expected. Not but that the Lord is Sovereign, and may “ do what he will with his own ;” and, if he pleases, may, and I suppose sometimes does, go out of the ordinary course, for the conversion of a sinner, or the guidance of a perplexed, or the comfort of a distressed soul : but I never took one step in dependence on any such extraordinary interpo-

sitions, nor ever encouraged any person to do so. And surely it will not be called enthusiasm, by any but avowed infidels, to believe God's word to be the standard of truth, and his promises to be faithful ; and, in this belief, to seek for the knowledge of the doctrines of the gospel in the manner above related. In this way I have been taught no new truths ; but as I believe, have been shewn the meaning, use, tendency, consistency, harmony, wisdom, and glory of those truths which are contained in the sacred volume ; but which before, through pride and ignorance, I perverted, neglected, reviled, and counted foolishness.—Nor do I make any pretences to infallibility. God hath not, I trust, left me so unstable as to float about in the uncertain stream of opinion, and to be “ tossed to and fro with “ every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of “ men and cunning craftiness, whereby “ they lie in wait to deceive.” As to the grand doctrines of the gospel, which I have marked out as necessary to salvation, they are neither so uncertain nor so difficult as men would persuade us ; their uncertainty and difficulty arise wholly from our pride, prejudice, love of sin, and inattentive igno-

rance of our own hearts. There is really much difficulty in bringing vain man to cease from leaning to his own understanding ; and in prevailing with him to “ trust “ in the Lord with all his heart,” and to be willing, in the humble posture of a little child, to be taught of God. Nothing but a deep conviction of guilt, a fear of wrath, and a sense of our lost condition by nature and practice, can bring the mind into this submissive frame ; but, this being effected, the difficulty is over, and the way of salvation is so plain that the “ way-faring man, “ though a fool, shall not err therein.” As to the other doctrines which I myself believe, though they seem plain enough to me, I desire not to proselyte others to them ; but am willing to leave them, as matters in which fallible men may differ without danger. And, as to my sufficiency for the faithful discharge of my ministry, to God’s glory, and the salvation of souls, he will not I trust deceive my expectations, which are grounded on his promises. For the rest, I mistake daily, and find myself in continual danger of mixing my own imaginations with his divine truth, and of following my own spirit instead of his. What-

ever I preach truly, or do wisely, to God be the glory ; for I am not sufficient of myself to think a good thought : whatever I speak falsely, or do foolishly, to me be the shame ; for it is the natural fruit of my own deceitful heart. If this be enthusiasm, it is an enthusiasm warranted, not only by the word of God, as I have endeavoured to prove, but by the whole liturgy of our church. We all at ordination profess to be ‘ moved by the Holy Ghost ’ to take the ministerial office upon us ; and assuredly we cannot be moved by the Holy Ghost, if we neither have the Holy Ghost, nor may expect his help and guidance. We agree to pray that the Lord would ‘ lead into the ‘ way of truth all such as have erred and ‘ are deceived ; ’ that he would ‘ illuminate ‘ all bishops, priests, and deacons, with the ‘ true knowledge and understanding of his ‘ holy word ; ’ that he would ‘ cleanse our ‘ hearts by the inspiration of the Holy ‘ Spirit ; ’ that he would ‘ grant us true repentance and his Holy Spirit : ’ with much more to this effect : and I am persuaded that such a confidence as I have expressed cannot be censured as enthusiasm, without including our church-establishment and

continual public worship in the same charge.

VII. Lastly I would observe that our opposers and despisers will seldom give us the hearing. With all their pretensions to candour, reasoning, and free inquiry, they accuse and condemn us without so much as knowing, with any tolerable degree of accuracy, what our sentiments are : although furnished with such plentiful means of information, in those numerous publications which are now extant upon these subjects.

Having imbibed strong prejudices against us, they frame so contemptible an opinion of our understandings and writings, that they will not bestow so much pains, or afford us so much regard; as to peruse our books : and to call an author a methodist¹ is with many people a sufficient reason why they should not read his works. Hence it comes to pass, that for want of information our doctrines are grievously misrepresented ; and in general the attacks made upon us, though calculated to make us odious and despised, do not in the least affect the argument in debate. Our adver-

¹ The term at present is *Calvinist*.

saries for the most part know little of our opinions, except what they have picked up by hearsay, in which neither the connection, consistency, tendency, nor application of those opinions is preserved ; no wonder therefore that we are vilified, or reproached with things to which we are utter strangers, or which we abominate, and protest against every Lord's day ; and against which we neglect not to fill our writings with reasonings, warnings, and cautions.

For my own part I freely acknowledge, that my strongest objections against this scheme of doctrine arose wholly from misapprehension and mistake. Not having read their books, my notions of the doctrines of the persons called methodists were received from vulgar report, and from their enemies ; while my creative imagination put its own construction on them, and drew terrible consequences from them ; so that, when I preached against them, I was as one fighting with my own shadow ; and, in speaking evil of those things that I knew not," I only betrayed my own ignorance and pride. No better founded are the lamentable outcries which at this day are made against our principles, as if they tended to

banish reason, argument, sober-mindedness, and morality out of the world ; and in their stead to substitute a set of whimsical vagaries, which are without foundation in reason and scripture, and have no influence, or rather a pernicious influence, on our conduct and conversation. When such a declamation is ended, (for one would not interrupt it,) ask the declaimer what a methodist is, and he can scarcely give you an answer : inquire about the doctrines of the methodists, he does not understand them, or their writings ; he has never read them !

Reader, if thou desirest to know what our opinions are, and what foundation there is for these heavy charges, read our books ; but read them with attention, and aim at impartiality : compare them with the word of God, and with the liturgy, articles, and homilies of the church of England : and, if thou hast leisure and opportunity, with the works of our first reformers. Nor do we desire thee to renounce thy reason, but only to make this reasonable concession ; that where thy reason is ready to determine one way, but God hath expressly determined another way, thou wouldst allow

him to understand his own mysteries better than thou dost ; and that therefore thou oughtest, by faith exercised upon the veracity of God, to receive, implicitly and without reasoning, those doctrines which God hath expressly revealed, and which thy reason feels to be far above out of its reach, and therefore doubtless out of its province. Whenever, on such inquiry, thou discoverest us to be mistaken, there dissent from us, yea blame us, as far as meekness and candour will permit ; but do not condemn us in the gross : do not assert our scheme of doctrine to be enthusiastical and groundless, though some of our writers should be found to have advanced questionable opinions. This were the way to drive all truth and certainty out of the world : for what book can be mentioned, the Bible excepted, in which there is nothing advanced, either erroneous or questionable ?

And be assured, that to read only one side of the question, and then clamorously to adopt every childish cavil, every vague report, every scandalous falsehood ; and industriously to propagate them, as if these afforded a sufficient confutation of all the

arguments, authorities, and scriptural testimonies, with which we support our sentiments ; is no evidence of a candid liberal mind, or of a sincere desire to know the truth.—And let it be observed, that, though some professors of these doctrines have been proved enthusiasts, and others detected to be hypocrites, this doth not prove that we are all enthusiasts and hypocrites. Such rash judgments are most hurtful to those who pass them.

For myself I here publicly profess that I will, to the end of my days, acknowledge it as the greatest obligation that any person can confer on me, if, in the spirit of meekness, he will point out to me any error or enthusiastical delusion into which I have fallen, and by sufficient arguments convince me of it. I trust that my earnest desire to discover “ the truth as it is in Jesus ” has not abated in its influence ; and that I still retain the same disinterested resolution to embrace it and adhere to it, with which I set out. Still am I solicitously fearful of being betrayed by warmth of spirit, and by the deceitfulness of my heart, into erroneous opinions. But clamour and reproach ; objections and arguments brought against

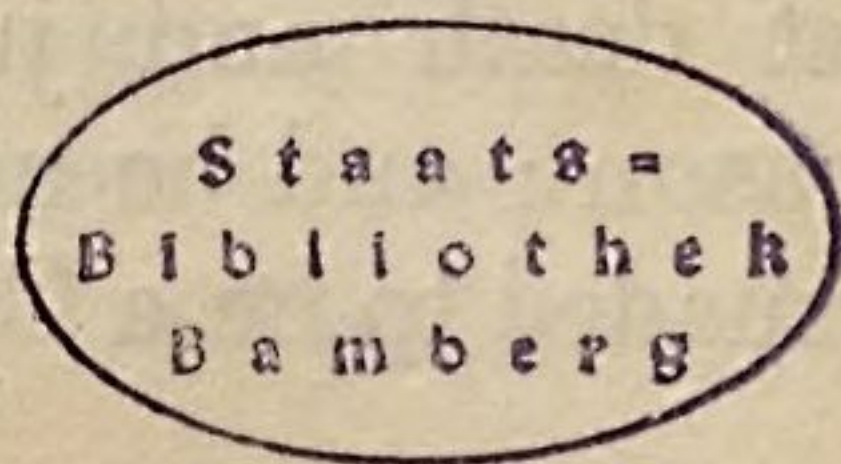
sentiments which I detest, or consequences which I cannot see to be fairly deducible from our doctrines ; or such reasonings as set one divine attribute at variance with another, make one part of the Bible contradict another, or exalt the human understanding upon the tribunal, and arraign and condemn revealed mysteries at her presumptuous bar ; will have no weight at all with me, or with any who ever “ knew “ the grace of God in truth.”

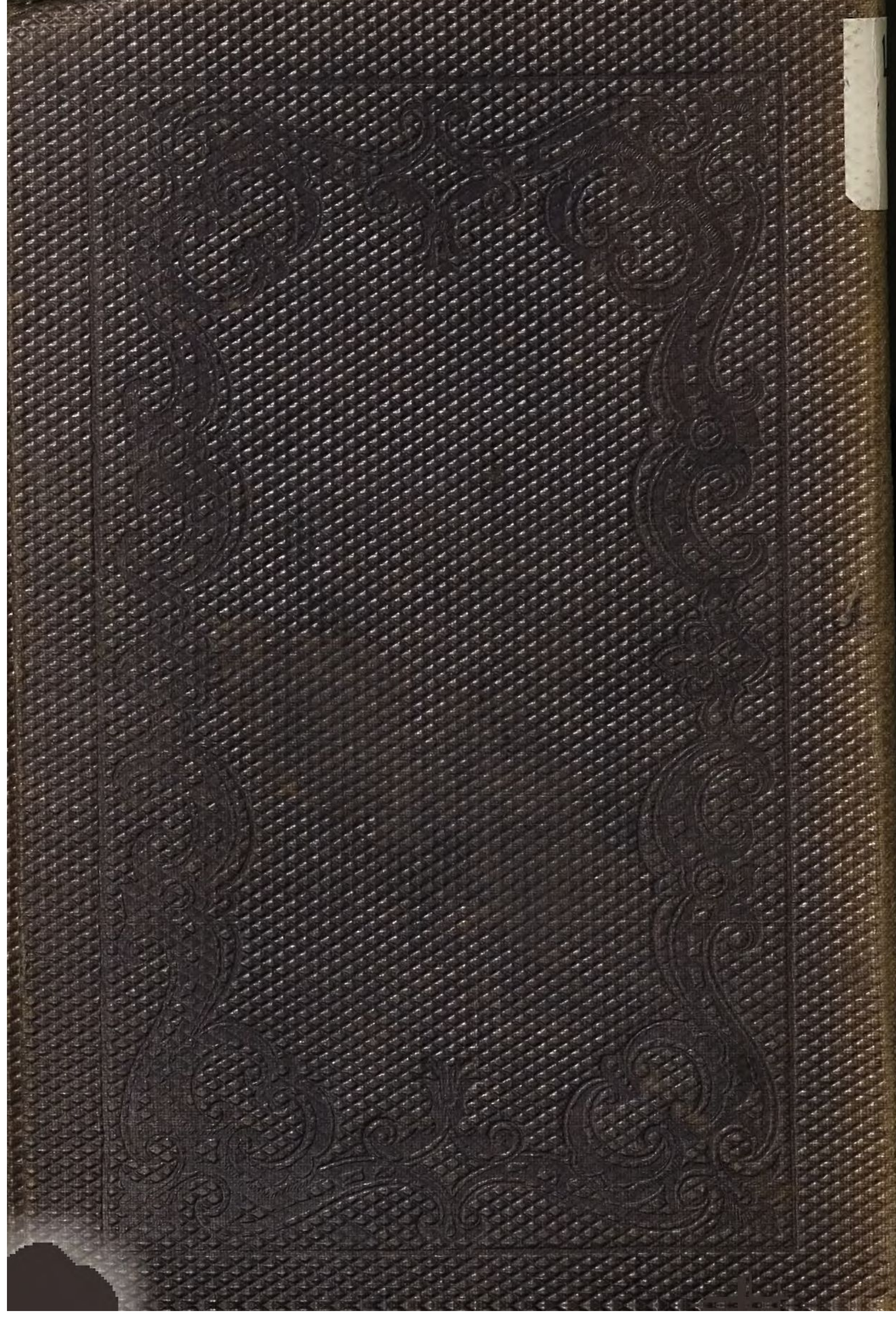
And now, beloved reader, let me conclude, with leaving it upon thy conscience to search for the truth of the gospel in the study of God’s word, accompanied by prayer, as thou wouldst search “ for hid “ treasure.” I give thee this counsel, expecting to meet thee at the day of judgment, that our meeting may be “ with joy “ and not with grief :” may the Lord incline thee to follow it with that solemn season full in view ! Time how short ! eternity how long ! life how precarious and vanishing ! death how certain ! the pursuits and employments of this present life how vain, unsatisfying, trifling, and vexatious ! God’s favour and eternal life how unspeakably precious ! His wrath, the never-

quenched fire, the never-dying worm, how dreadful ! Oh ! trifle not away the span of life, in heaping up riches, which, shortly must be left for ever, and which “ profit not in the day of wrath ; ” in such pleasures and amusements as will issue in eternal torments , or in seeking that glory, which shall be swallowed up in everlasting infamy. Agree with me but in this, that it is good to redeem precious time, to “ labour for the meat that endureth unto “ everlasting life,” and to attend principally to “ the one thing needful : ” take thy measure of truth, as well as of duty, from the word of God ; be willing to be taught of God ; meditate on his word day and night ; let it be the light of thy feet, and “ the lantern of thy paths ; ” and, in studying it, “ lean not to thine own understanding ; ” trust not implicitly to expositors and commentators, but ask wisdom and teaching of God : be not a Felix, saying to thy serious apprehensions about thy soul, “ Go thy way for this time, when I “ have a convenient season I will call for “ thee ; ” lest death and judgment come before that season : and be not an Agrippa, “ almost persuaded to be a Christian ; ” but

seek to be altogether such as the primitive Christians were : I say, only agree with me in these reasonable requests, and we shall at length agree in all things ; in many, in this world ; in all when we hear the Son of God address us in these rejoicing words, “ Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit
“ the kingdom prepared for you from the
“ foundation of the world.”—May the Lord vouchsafe unto the writer, and to every reader of this narrative, “ that wisdom
“ which is from above ; ” that teaching of his Holy Spirit which guides into the way of peace ; that faith which justifies, and works by love ; that peace of God which passeth understanding ; and that measure of sanctifying and strengthening grace which may enable each of us to be
“ stedfast and unmoveable, always abound-
“ ing in the work of the Lord, as knowing
“ that our labour shall not be in vain in the
“ Lord ! ”

THE END.





Scott, Thomas

The force of truth an authentic narrative

London 1836

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